# The Beaver

WINTER 1980

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Lyrics of most selections are in Inuktitut or Cree.

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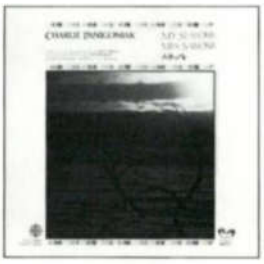

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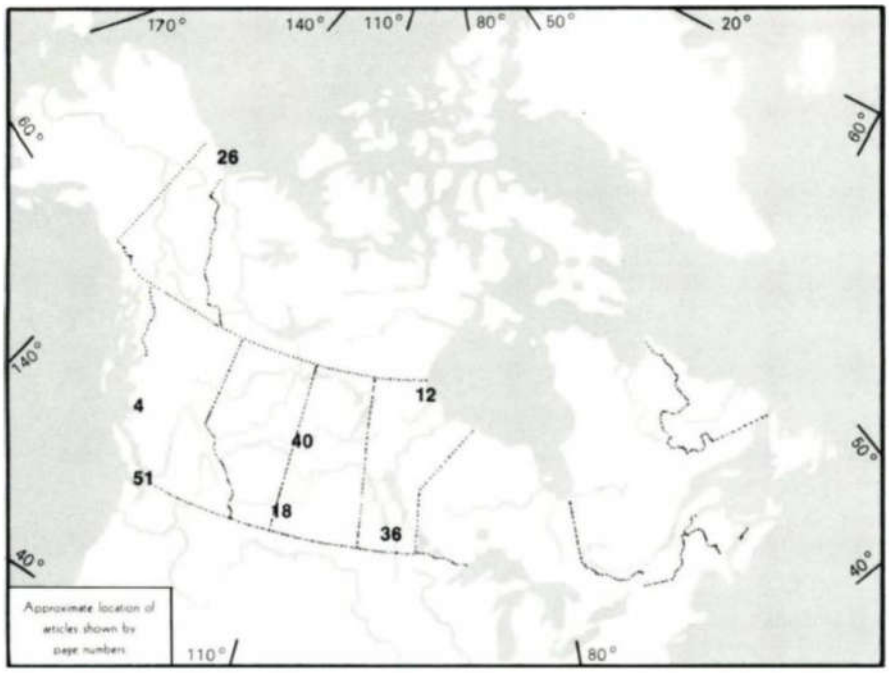
## MAGAZINE OF THE NORTH

*Editor: Helen Burgess*

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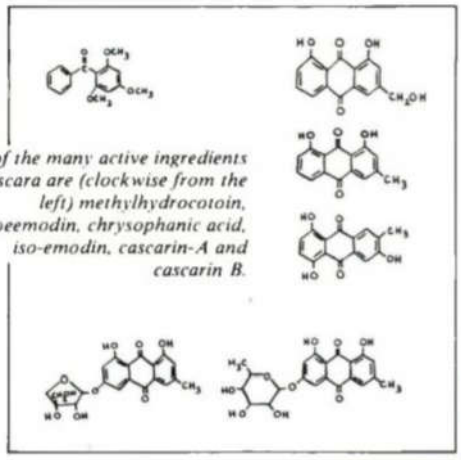
*Pacific Coastal Indians were found to be using 'Cascara (bark) Sagrado (holy)' c. 1825. The quart sealer of medicine shown here was decocted in the Bella Coola kitchen of Willie and Hazel Hans, August 1978. The Cascara Sagrada Extract tablets (right) and Aromatic Cascara Compound liquid (left) are from the mission hospital's dispensary.*



*Six of the many active ingredients in Cascara are (clockwise from the left) methylhydrocotoin, aloeemodin, chrysophanic acid, iso-emodin, cascarin-A and cascarin B.*

*Old and new peelings of 'Cascara sagrada' are displayed by Willie Hans, Sr, in a traditional gathering grove at South Bentick, August 1978.*

# BELLA COOLA

## INDIAN AND EUROPEAN MEDICINES

BY GRANT THOMAS EDWARDS

*Photographs by the author, unless otherwise credited.*

*The author, Bella Coola's first pharmacist, tells of the use of European medicines at Bella Coola and draws some parallels between them and the traditional Indian medicines. He expresses thanks to the elders and cultural centre of Bella Coola; and to the libraries of the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London; and the Drug and Poison Information Centre, Saint Paul's Hospital, Vancouver. Linguistics by Henk F. Nater, University of Leiden, Holland.*

FELICITY WALKUS, a matriarch of the Bella Coola Indians, reflects on the health of her people in earlier times. '. . . none of the young ones die. And the old peoples, they had to fall apart before they die, and they go right down to the knee, so old. Our first generations were healthier. Not like the way we are now today. The difference is we had no sugar, no tea, no bread. All we had was fruit, fresh meat, and a little bit of this and that from the woods. We had mostly dry fish, dry meat. They was in the long-houses, and there's lots of air holes in there, in the smokehouse. That had something to do with it — fresh air.'

Patriarch Willie Hans, Sr, also recalls: 'The people long ago, they really strong people. Everything they eat, you know, and the wild fruit. And lots of work, and packing wood for the smokehouse. 'Cause they pole up on the canoe too. They all had handmade dugout canoes, and they got a sea canoe. Paddle with it and exercise the body all the time. Like us now today, everything automatic. I'm a fisherman, you know. When I go fishin', the machine do all the work. I guess that's why the people were strong long ago.'

The Bella Coolas' introduction to European medicine was at the hand of Sir Alexander Mackenzie during the North West Company's maiden land expedition to the west coast of North America. At 'Great Village' (now mapped as Noosgulch River), on 19 July 1793 Mackenzie recorded:

'At an early hour this morning I was again visited by the chief, in company with his son. The former complained of a pain in his breast; to relieve his suffering I gave him a few drops of Turlington's balsam on a piece of sugar; and I was rather surprised to see him take it without the least hesitation. When he had taken my medicine, he requested me to follow him, and conducted me to a shed, where several people were assembled round a sick man, who was another of his sons. They immediately uncovered him, and showed me a violent ulcer in the small of his back, in the foulest state that can be imagined. One of his knees was also afflicted in the same manner. This unhappy man was reduced to a skeleton, and, from his appearance, was drawing near to an end of his pains. They requested that I would touch him, and his father was very urgent with me to administer medicine; but he was in such a dangerous state, that I thought it prudent to yield no further to the importunities than to give the sick person a few drops of Turlington's balsam in some water.'

The same day, Mackenzie continued down Bella Coola River, losing ashore his canine mascot — 'a circumstance of no small regret to me'. Upon retiring that night, the Pacific tide flats and fjord were in sight.

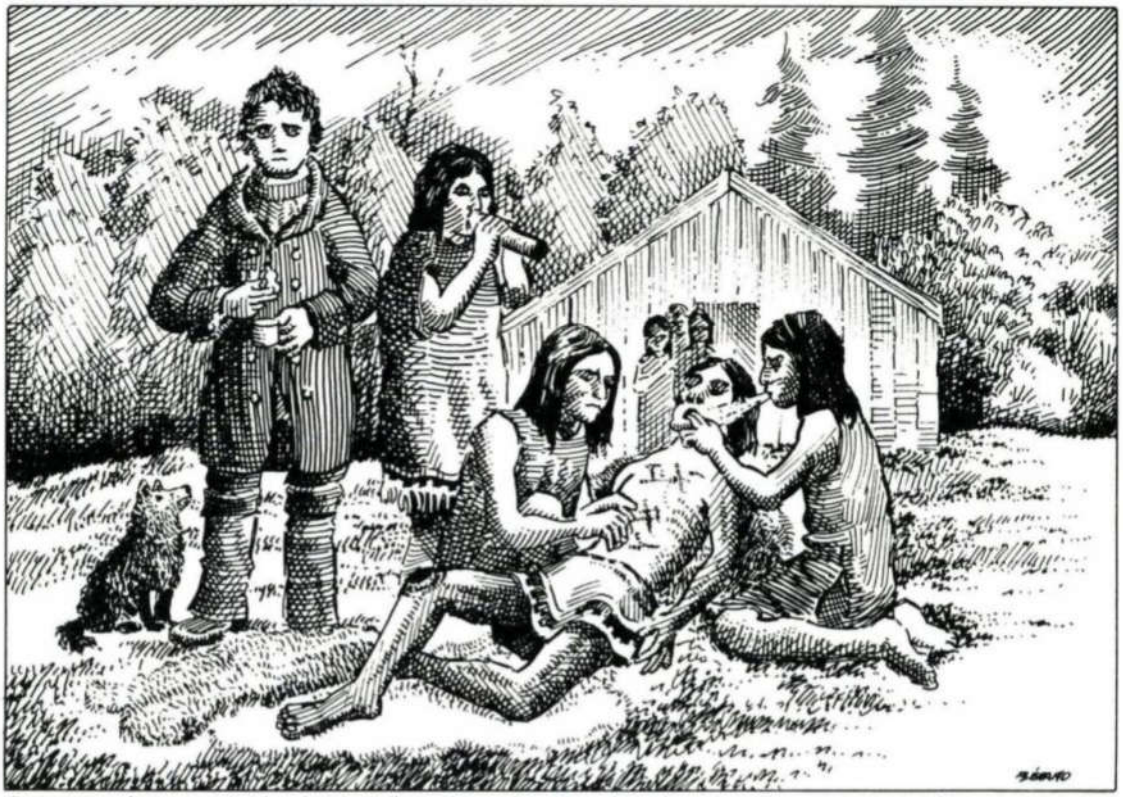
Farther west the explorer wrote, 'I now mixed up some vermilion in melted grease, and inscribed, in large characters, on the south-east face of the rock on which we had slept last night, this brief memorial "Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three." '

On the 25th Mackenzie's countermarch halted at Great Village again:

'Our late conductors had informed us that the man whom we left in a dying state, and to whom I had administered some Turlington's balsam, was dead; and it was by no means improbable that I might be suspected of hastening his end . . . I proceeded to the abode of the chief . . . who explained to me that he was in a state of deep distress for the loss of his son, and made me understand that he had cut off his hair [a custom yet practised] and blackened his face on the melancholy occasion.'

Condolences made and gifts exchanged, the North Westers left the village at 'half past three' and, 'As we were continuing our route, we all felt the sensation of having found a lost friend at the sight of our dog; but he appeared, in a great degree, to have lost his former sagacity.'

Though Turlington's Balsam of Life failed when it was first used in Bella Coola, it was an apt example of



*European medicine was introduced to the Bella Coola people in 1793 when Alexander Mackenzie gave a few drops of Turlington's balsam to one of the chief's sons. The native medicine men treated the patient by blowing, whistling, pressing their extended fingers with all their strength on his stomach, and putting their fore-fingers doubled into his mouth. Drawing by Réal Bérard.*

panaceas from the Old Country. Dating from the fifteenth or sixteenth century, this nostrum has enjoyed more names than any other preparation in the pharmacopeias, in excess of two dozen, including *Balsamum Catholicum, Balsamum Friari, Jerusalem, Persian,* and *Swedish Balsam*, and *Balsam of the Holy Victorious Knight*. The English version began with King George II granting his Royal Patent on 18 January 1744 and from twenty-seven ingredients it was prepared and sold at Lombard Street, London, for 3 shillings 6 pence. In 1750, as a measure against forgeries, Robert Turlington refashioned his bottles, in the shape of a violin, and included with each purchase a personally signed bill of directions and a seventy-six-page testimonial book. There were some thirty ailments which it was purported to cure, ranging from green wounds, through the stone and gravel, gout and rheumatism, coughs, colic and other stomach ailments, to 'sinking of the spirits and the decay of nature'.

The sixty years after Mackenzie's visit were relatively free of European contact. Midway into the 1800s the occasional freeman arrived to trade furs. Then smallpox swooped. The epidemic was observed by Lieutenant Henry Spencer Palmer of the Royal Engineers during 'a reconnaissance . . . of survey over the route from North Bentick to the Fraser.' From Royal Engineer Camp, New Westminster, British Columbia, 24 November 1862, the Lieutenant reported,

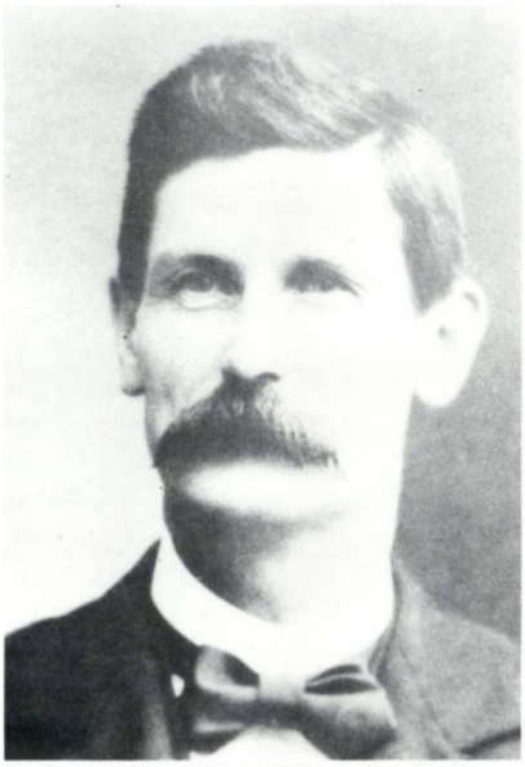
'Smallpox this year contributed a sad quota of death. During my stay there [Bella Coola in July] this disease, which had only just broken when I arrived, spread so rapidly that, in a week, nearly all the healthy had scattered from the lodges and gone to encamp by families in the woods, only, it is to be feared, to carry away the seeds of infection and death in the blankets and other articles they took with them. Numbers were dying each day; sick men and women were taken into the woods and left with a blanket and two or three salmon to die by themselves and rot unburied; sick children were tied to trees, and naked grey-haired medicine-men, hideously painted, howled and gesticulated night and day in front of the lodges in mad efforts to stay the progress of the disease.'

The same horror colours the words of those who recount the epidemic secondhand. The village's eldest patriarch, Dan Nelson, Sr, born New Year's, 1898, recalls what his mother told him about James Taylor, a freeman fur trader who kept a small farm a few miles east of Bella Coola: 'Taylor stay in the summer, you know, around July that time. He lived here that

Cliff Kopas

*Bella Coola's Dr Herbert A. McLean and nurse Ivy Whitmore, on a journey by horse to neighbouring Ulkatcho Indian territory, vaccinate an Anahim child against pertussis in 1934.*

Emmanuel United Church



*The Reverend John C. Spencer M.D., the first physician to take charge of the Methodist manse at Bella Coola.*

time and poisoned the people. The smallpox came out after he gave them the tobacco. Taylor was just throwing papers outside where the Indians were living. The papers had the stain of poison on them. Kids play with it, you know.

'People were dying of that poison. They don't want to die in the house, and they just go by the families to the bushes. And they just fix their beds there, and they just die there in piles. Nobody was burying them, because everybody was sick.

'And one old lady keep the tobacco. She put it away. Kept it for one whole year. And then took it out. She thought, 'I guess no more poison in that smoke.' And then shaved some and put it in her pipe. And she smoked it, and she came out with smallpox. That's how they proved that Taylor really did poison it. He left [in 1863] after he did this.'

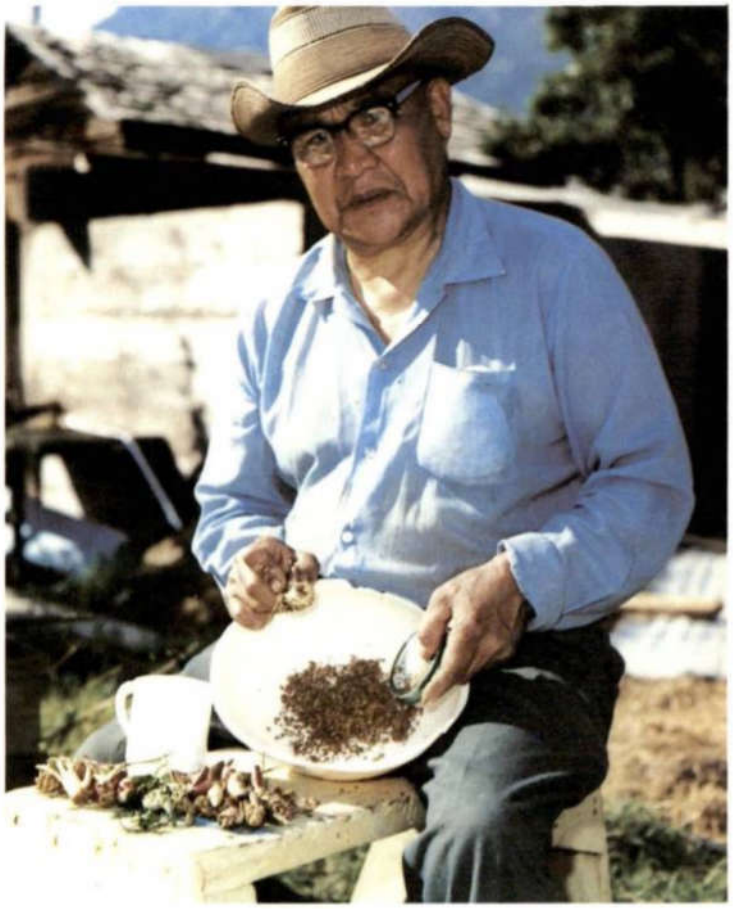
Flossie Webber recalls her mother's words: 'Everybody said, "If I soon gonna died, I'm gonna shoot him." Nobody shoot him too. His name Taylor.'

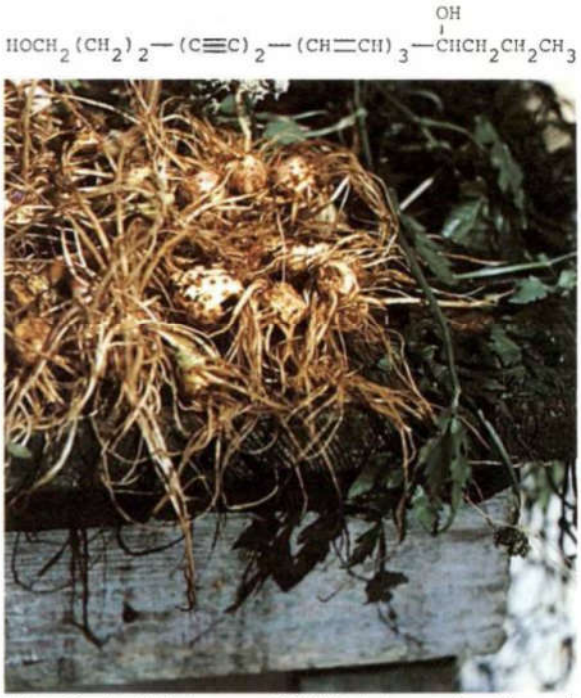
In 1867 the Hudson's Bay Company established an outstation at Bella Coola, and fifteen years later Reverend William H. Pierce introduced a succession of Methodist missionaries. Settlement was substantiated in 1894 when 79 Norwegian Americans from the depressed Dakotas and Minnesota colonized Bella Coola for its fjords, forests, and fish.

At the Methodist manse, medicine was available to the Indians at an obligation, implied or perceived, to give up their old ways. Medicine's rank in the roll of traditions was revealed in the annual report to *The Missionary Outlook*, made by the married couple Edward and Kezia Nicholas '[1889] Our hearts have many times been cheered as one and another have accepted the free salvation, being made happy in a Saviour's love. Among the converts is an old medicine man.'

In September 1899, the Reverend John C. Spencer, M.D., took charge at the manse, as Bella Coola's first physician. In the spring of the century he reported in *The Missionary Outlook*: 'Such medical and surgical [cases] as we are able to handle get our best efforts, but in this as in all things there must be the educative period. Some are doubtful and shy of white man's methods, and in many cases prefer weeks of suffering to submitting to treatment. Some are now past that stage and gladly seek relief at our hands. We have been able to help some in this village, even to saving of lives. Patients have come in from other villages and recovered. For all these blessings we render humble thanks to God.'

Two years later Spencer suffered an illness, which he himself had expected to prove fatal. As he was at his gravest, a spokesman came to his bed: 'We have had a meeting of chiefs and they have sent me to say





*Water Hemlock's hollow stem, 20-80" high, is topped by a flattened umbrella of clustered tiny white flowers, and towards ground turns from green to pink. The root has a distinguishing odour, and when mature its cross section exposes cross walls and air chambers. It grows in northern temperate swamps, wet marshes and meadows, and along streams from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.*

*William Hans, Sr. grates bulbous roots of Water Hemlock (Cicuta douglasii). Gratings of thirteen roots were used in a teapot of boiled water to make the poisonous hemlock medicine.*

to you, do not feel heavy hearted, you are among friends; we have learned to love you and are sorry to lose you, but we will make you a good coffin, roll your body in good new blankets and dig your grave in a nice dry place; then we will give your belongings to whoever you name, or we will box them up and send them to your own people.'

Spencer recovered to write the account, and in 1906 reported: 'Most of the people went to Kimsquit in November to attend a potlatch, and while there the children contacted whooping cough. It lingered among them all winter, terminating in death for several.'

Yet another infectious disease, tuberculosis, was claiming souls — more from the natives than the pioneers. Bella Coola's exposure, and so its resistance, had been lower than Europe's.

Being insidious, tuberculosis had been more difficult to understand. In the early 1800s, French physician René T. H. Laënnec linked lung cavities and grey nodules in other organs to the one disease. Communicability awaited demonstration, from humans to rabbits, by Villemin in 1868. In 1882, German bacteriologist Robert Koch discovered the cause and went on to introduce the diagnostic tuberculin skin test in 1890.

Bella Coola and the world were still without a cure. Classic treatment — rest, good nutrition, isolation, and artificial lung collapse — was rudimentary. Bella Coola built a small hospital in 1910, but the predominance of tuberculosis amongst the Indians led Dr T. Francis Cavanaugh, the town doctor, to design an open-air sanitorium. The blueprint was handed, with a building request, to Bella Coola's Indian Agent, Iver Fougner, in 1912. Of the plan, Fougner wrote to the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa: 'It will give a lot of sunlight, but it seems to me that, at times, some protection against wind, sun, flies and mosquitoes etc. must also be thought of in a sanitorium.' Ottawa's reply was: 'There are no funds available . . . the Doctor should be able to do much in teaching the necessity of guarding against contagion, and he should warn them particularly with respect to carelessness in regard to sputum . . . Now that summer is coming on, Indians affected with the disease should be induced to live as much as possible

in the open air . . . The sick persons should be kept apart from other members of the family, but of course proper care should be given in cases of illness.'

Until 1900, human and bovine tuberculosis were thought to be one, but Theobald Smith, an American pathologist, distinguished the two. The dairy strain was virulent to man; the crusade for pure milk became universal. In 1917, for instance, the United States Department of Agriculture called for tuberculin testing of all American cattle, and slaughter of all reactors.

On 4 October 1913, the *Bella Coola Courier* published: 'Dr. Cavanaugh . . . reports to us that he found unmistakeable tuberculosis in one of the valley cattle.' The information was relayed by Indian Agent Fougner's October 10 letter to his Ottawa superiors: 'I have the honor to report that in the summer time Indians [on horseback] from the Interior [Anahim] visit Bella Coola to barter and camp for one or more weeks at a time. Cows graze freely round these camps. If some of these Indians were affected with tuberculosis would it not be possible or probable that cows would thus become tubercular, and white people be infected with tubercular germs through the milk?' Ottawa's advice was to build a fence and this was done.

In Bella Coola, delay in treating the disease was disastrous. The epidemics had reduced the Indian population at least eightfold from 1838 to World War I. The lowest population figure was reached in the early 1920s, at just over 200 souls. This was the time when the surviving tribes of Kimsquit, Kwatna, South Bentick, and Bella Coola amalgamated at Bella Coola for security in numbers, and the hospital, school, and commerce were centered there.

In France, Louis Pasteur and Jules-Franc Joubert demonstrated antibiotic activity of common air bacteria against anthrax in 1877, and Pasteur discovered several vaccines in the early 1880s. In his hunt for 'magic bullets' against bacteria, German chemist Paul Ehrlich coined 'chemotherapy' in 1904. Finally in 1928, at Saint Mary's Hospital in England, Sir Alexander Fleming discovered that a substance from the green mould *Penicillium notatum* was lethal against the bacteria *Staphylococcus aureus*. Fleming christened the substance 'penicillin', but it proved too unstable to isolate for use. In Germany, in 1932, Gerhard J. P. Domagk synthesized the first sulfonamide antibiotic, to be marketed as *Prontosil®*. The 'Golden Age of Chemotherapy' was truly launched in 1940, when Ernst B. Chain purified and stabilized penicillin in Sir Howard W. Florey's laboratory at Oxford.

The epidemics quieted. Benefits of medicine from the Old Country were readily at hand at the mission hospital in Bella Coola. The Indian population climbed steadily after 1934.

Bella Coola medicine's most dramatic parallel with the Old World is also its most ancient. The Water Hemlock (*Cicuta douglasii*), of Bella Coola, and Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), of Greece, are both poisonous members of the parsley family, but vary by genus. Their botanical distinction was not clear until the 1500s. In 399 B.C., the great philosopher Socrates was sentenced by the Athenian Senate to 'drink the hemlock', for corruption of the youth and indifference to the city's gods.

In Plato's *Phaedo* is read: 'The jailer carrying the cup of poison said [to Socrates] "You have only to walk about until your legs are heavy, and then lie down, and the poison will act." . . . then raising the cup to his lips, quite readily and cheerfully [Socrates] drank off the poison.'

Both hemlocks are among nature's most poisonous plants. Their deadly principles are different. That in Bella Coola's hemlock is a resin called cicutoxin, a central nervous system stimulant, akin to picrotoxin. Seemingly trifling bits of Water Hemlock root, down to dime-size, can kill man or livestock, as can greater amounts of any other part of the plant.

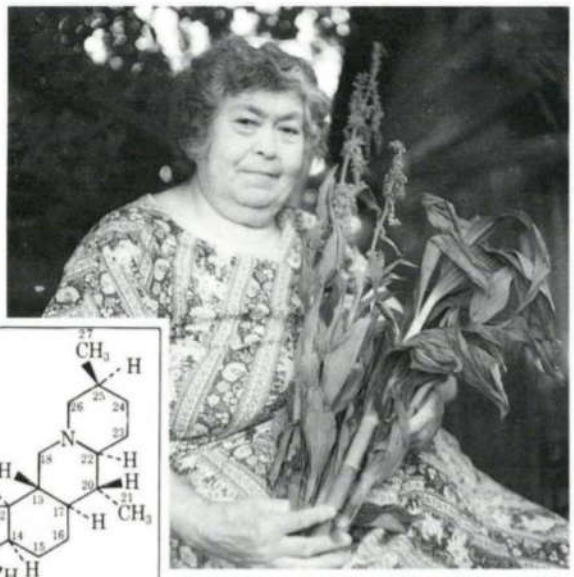
The major manifestations of cicutoxin poisoning are convulsions and respiratory failure, and cardiac arrest may occur. Symptoms commence from within fifteen minutes to less than half an hour. Death, by respiratory or cardiac arrest, can strike in less than fifteen minutes, but may be delayed until eight hours or more after ingestion.

No specific antidote is available. However, conventional poisoning intervention and emergency treatment of symptoms may be life saving. This century the medical journals have reported some eighty poisonings with a three-of-ten-treated fatality rate.

It is a wonder that Water Hemlock acquired medicinal utility at all. Oral history in Bella Coola does not list the symptoms of cicutoxin poisoning (these have accumulated at hospital emergency wards) but it does dictate extreme caution in dealing with the plant, and respects its deadliness. The Bella Coola people indeed 'drink the hemlock' to rid the system of bile, but then drink warm water.

Felicity Walkus talks on indications, '*Maxwuuli* is Water Hemlock in our language. When you have a sour stomach or chest, that's when you drink this. I think that's why the old peoples, the first generation, were so healthy. They kinda feelin' sick — they go and get it and drink it and make themselves vomit.'

Margaret Siwallace instructs: 'Your last meal is suppertime. In the morning when you get up you take it. Then we'd get about ten or fifteen of these little plants or less. It depends on how big they are. Wash those bulbs and tear off the little roots. In our days we used to use a nail on a tin lid. And the rough surface on the other side, that's the one we scrape it



*The poisonous and medicinal Indian Hellebore (Veratrum eschscholtzii) is held by Margaret Siwallace of Bella Coola, July 1978. The plant's active agents are many veratrum alkaloids, typified by the ceveratrum nucleus (inset).*

on, like a cheese grater [rough stone was used formerly]. Then we'd grate 'til we'd get about half a cup of these grated stuff. And then we'd pour hot water into this grated stuff and we stir it up, mind you, not cookin' it. Just the one cup. Then we pour it to this cheesecloth [cedar bark basket used formerly] and drain it to another cup. Then we drink that juice out of that grated Water Hemlock. Just the one cup. And we let it stand in our stomach. And when you want to vomit [poisoning symptom] you start drinking warm water. When there's no more greenish coloured stuff in the water that comes out of you, you just quit taking the warm water. Now you're exhausted. Then you sleep. Then after you wake up, you could eat. You'll feel light as a feather the next day. You feel quite light and strong and you feel a lot better — buoyancy like in your body, you know.'

The influenza pandemic of 1918-19, which claimed 20 million souls, was treated by the Bella Coola people using their traditional medicines. Margaret Siwallace recalls: '1918 was the year of the big flu. And then when I got sick, my grandfather got some medicines, Devil's Club [*Oplopanax horridum*] and Swamp Gooseberry [*Ribes lacustra*]. He brewed it up and make me drink it.' Put to bed, but curious, Margaret slipped down the steps to watch her older folks: 'The whole house was sick. My grandfather was walking around keeping a fire and water going. And Mrs. Joshua Moody was there with *Maxwuuli* [Water Hemlock]. She used this on a lot of people to help them, house to house she went, for that flu.'

The common pill for a common ill of both Bella Coola and Europe is the laxative of the Cascara tree. Many Cascara species are scattered about the globe, but those which enjoyed major medical utility in Europe were *Rhamnus frangula* (bark) and *Rhamnus cathartica* (berries).

The use of *Rhamnus cathartica* as a folk medicine preceded the Norman Conquest of 1066 and in the 1200s Welsh physicians were prescribing a Cascara and honey drink for constipation. Spain's earliest records of use are from 1305, and by the sixteenth century the plant was registered in most manuscripts on medicinal plants.

Meanwhile, the Pacific coastal Indians, from Bella Coola south to California, were utilizing bark of their own *Rhamnus* species as a laxative. This became evident to the Spanish colonists of California and *Rhamnus purshiana* was 'discovered' c. 1825. The Indians' medicine was much kinder than Europe's, the latter being harsh and irritating. So remarkable was the difference that the Spaniards named the Indian plant 'Cascara (bark) Sagrado (holy)'.

The European cousin lost favour, and as the old pill bottles say, 'Cascara Sagrada was introduced to the medical profession in 1877 by Parke, Davis & Co.' Holy Bark was harvested from the Pacific coast and marketed universally.

Elder, Edward Tallio, speaks on Holy Bark: 'I don't know what they call it in English, but I know it in our language, 'n that's *Snukwlkwlyaals* ['yellow-green', after inner bark colour]. It cleans your stomach you know. It's just like Epsom Salts. You can't use Epsom Salts for everything — it's the same as that. We're still across the river [Old Bella Coola, pre 1938] when the people go make special trip for this medicine at South Bentick [35 miles by boat]. They used to go long ago you know, but now they depend on the doctor. It looks like Alder, but you can smell the medicine in the bark. If you just peel the tree as it stands the whole tree dies. The roots must die too I guess. Nothin' comes up. Therefore we have to chop the tree down in order to have young ones come out again, or they just peel one side. Take all the bark with a butcher knife. We used to get a mush sack, a 25-pound porridge sack. We fill that up you know, and we get plenty, packed up tight. If we get enough it last us for about two or three years. They keep a long time. Just put 'em in a sack or paper box. Make it dry. When you make a medicine out of it you just soak it. When you sick you put 'em on a stove with water and slow cook it about half a day or more.

Lady elder, Flossie Webber, recounts from c. 1937: 'I don't know what kind of sickness I had. Doctor doesn't know too. The doctor took me in for two days in the hospital. Let me out again. But I gettin' skinny. I can't eat nothin', just cup a tea, cup a tea. I'm only 90 pounds that time. I know myself, I'm gonna die, so

I gave my baby to my brother, and my husband John Webber take me to South Bentick. And quite a bit of us you know, my husband, and Willie Tallio, and Gordon Tallio. They had three gas boats. They used to go trappin' in there. And Johnnie Hans and I go get that *Snukwlkwlyaals* for me. We use a row boat. We just look around in the bush and we get it. I take one cup in the morning and one cup in the dinnertime, but when I start I didn't take too much you know, about two inches in a cup. I get better with that too.

'It's good too for that TB on the lung. Not too much for that though, maybe an inch in a cup, every day, twice a day. You lay off awhile, maybe two weeks, then you start again. Slowly gettin' better.'

In the first century A.D., Greek herbalist Dioscorides described White Hellebore of the lily family, and the mixture of its powdered root with honey as a poison for mice. Bella Coola's member of the lilies is Indian Hellebore (*Veratrum eschscholtzii*), and is known locally as 'poison root'. Both lilliceae are poisonous and harbour the toxic veratrum alkaloids — verdriene, veratrine, veratramine, veratrasine, veratrin, and others. In moderation the veratrum alkaloids lower blood pressure. This action has not been recognized or employed by the Bella Coola Indians, but modern medicine has extracted the hypotensive agents for treatment of hypertension.

In South Bentick, 1921, Tallio Hans and his fourteen-year-old son Willie were on the trap line. Willie Hans, Sr recalls: 'I ask my Dad, "Why is this? What kind of animal dig those roots here Daddy?" "That's grizzly bear", he says. "And why he do that for?" "That's his food — that's really strong stuff." What's left over on those roots, he grab it you know, and gave me a small piece. Told me to put it in my mouth and chew it. And not long time my tongue just like burning. He say, "If you chew it and swallow it, it makes you dizzy", so he told me to not swallow the juice. He said, "That's the one we call *Putsk*. It's a strong medicine." '

Mr Hans, now with more experience, adds, 'If you take too much you feel dizzy, and your legs get weak. You just feel yourself just like gonna collapse, you know, how strong. And you mouth just get numb, you know.'

Elder Clayton Mack, Sr, the village's best bear hunter, says, 'Poison root, that's grizzly bear medicine. That's what the bears feed on in spring and fall, before hibernation or right after they come out. But they pretty mean after they eat it. You know, they get a foam come right out of their mouth, and they stagger.'

Clayton Mack, Sr., has observed that: 'In the fall the grizzlies come down to eat salmon. Grizzly bears is just full of tapeworms. The worms come from salmon in the river. Then he goes up the mountain and he eats poison roots. Bears gotta clean that right out before they hibernate or else the tapeworms would kill them in the wintertime. Before the snow comes they start to feed on poison roots and they don't eat fish after that. If they don't do it then, they wouldn't find it when the snow comes. There's some other roots besides [Skunk Cabbage, *Lysichitum americanum*]. They must help too.'

Margaret Siwallace describes the 'defusing' of Indian Hellebore: 'There's a vein in the middle of the root. That has to be taken out. That's the real poisonest one. The outside is poison enough. The center of the root makes a person die. You have to take that core in a root out, when it's fresh, not dry, if you want to use it for your own mouth.'

Mrs Siwallace explains: 'They boil four roots and use the water as a bath, from head to foot. Wash their hair with it too. This is for scabies, or just aches and pains, or before gambling. That takes the human smell away from the person too, for hunting. Some people take four pieces of that, quarter inch each, swallow it with the center taken out, and they make themselves vomit it out. When they are able to count four they know they safe. They not gonna die. And then it's just like as if you get everything away from the rest. Makes you lucky for those Indian games or cards.' A variation of this rite, as a charm to gather game, fish, or furs, involves the swallowing of the root bit and then diving into the river, a total of four times.

Bear hunters carry roots on their person as luck and protection against their prey. If a Bella Coola feels 'spooked' a root may be heated on the stovetop to smoking, and similar smudges have been used to fumigate homes of influenza. Protection against the supernatural is said to be afforded by hanging poison root on the wall. Juice from a quarter or half inch of pithed root is swallowed by some for a bad cold, and by others to gain the strength of a grizzly bear. Sprains, bruises, unopen sores, and arthritis have been treated with poultices or compresses of Hellebore concoctions, and bone fracture splints lined with Hellebore leaves.

In 1921, Skookum Mary told her great-great-niece Margaret Siwallace a story of the great famine: 'The people heard a gnawing sound within their cedar box of smoked salmon and saw their store depleting. One at each corner, they removed the remaining salmon. Neither gnawer nor its signs or crumbs were found. An old man thought to sprinkle powdered poison root on the insides and bottom of the box, especially in the four corners. The food was replaced. Success was achieved only if sprinkling was repeated every four days, but the gnawing creature was never discovered.'

Perhaps Skookum Mary's gnawing was the ghost of Dioscorides' mice. ◆

# Inuit Journey by Boat, 1913

An extract from the lively journal of Christian Leden, a Norwegian ethnographer who travelled and lived with the Eskimo people along the west coast of Hudson Bay, 1913.

TRANSLATION BY LESLIE H. NEATBY

ON 16 AUGUST 1913 the Norwegian ethnographer Christian Leden landed at Churchill with the purpose of studying 'the life, customs and usages of the Eskimo peoples dwelling to the west and north-west of Hudson Bay' — in effect the hinterland of Rankin Inlet. 'No ethnographer had so far learned anything precise about these folk: scholars knew of their existence, and that was all.'

Leden was well equipped for his task: two Greenland journeys had made him acquainted with the native language and ways; he had the backing of the University of Oslo Museum and of the royal family of Norway, and had, in addition, received a subsidy from the government of Canada.

The white inhabitants of Churchill were few in number in 1913: the Hudson's Bay Company, four members of the Royal North West Mounted Police, a missionary and two government surveyors. The two Hudson's Bay Company men had invited Leden to be their guest, but he declined and set himself up in his tent for greater freedom in mixing with his Eskimo neighbours. Some dozen families had camped for the summer a short distance away near Prince of Wales's Fort, permitting the newcomer to compare them with the Indians who frequented the port. The Indians, he said, had surrendered to white influence, while the Eskimos were still 'free, self-reliant and vigorous'.

On Leden's first visit to the tent-camp 'the dogs were the first to announce my approach. . . . If the stranger belongs to the same race as the dogs' masters they do not exert their lungs to excess, but let it be a so-called white man and they mark the circumstance with all the power they possess. It seems that each race has its own peculiar bodily odour, and the dogs never fail to distinguish it. It matters not whether the white man comes newly washed and shaved and clothed as a European, or unwashed and in Eskimo garb — the dogs detect his foreign scent.' Leden strolled through the camp, meeting with a good reception in every tent, though the inhabitants laughed heartily at his Greenland accent and phraseology. His immediate acceptance by the natives was demonstrated by the flock of half-grown youngsters who escorted him back to his sleeping-place — and received a reward from his store of knick-knacks.

He soon had cause to be thankful for the good understanding thus established. In return for a cash deposit the Hudson's Bay Company had contracted to give him transport that autumn, along with his stores — foodstuffs, medical aids and other equipment — to his intended base on Chesterfield Inlet. Week after week elapsed. September was drawing to a close, ice was forming on the river, the ground was snow-covered, but the promised schooner failed to appear. Rather than lose a season he applied to the Company trader who consented to provide him with a boat and pay the crew's wages if Leden, in return, would load stores for the trading station at Chesterfield. A number of Eskimos, as desirous as himself of wintering farther north, were ready to make up a crew on condition of taking with them their families, dependants and household effects. Leden had no choice but to agree and was obliged to leave part of his own supplies in storage at Churchill. This was to prove the one fortunate circumstance of that unlucky cruise.

All was ready for embarkation on 30 September. The boat was jammed with sledges, weapons, kitchenware, decayed seal and walrus meat for dog

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*Dr Neatby, retired professor of classics, University of Saskatchewan, is author of numerous articles and books on the exploration of the Arctic. His book 'Frozen Ships' is a translation of the Arctic diary of the Moravian missionary Johann Miertsching, 1850-54.*

*A Hudson's Bay Company coast boat at the mouth of the Churchill River, 1913.*

food and 'several bags of stinking fat . . . partly for lighting purposes and partly for cooking during the winter'.

When all these materials have been brought on board there followed the procession of wives, children and grandmothers of the crew — and, of course, the inevitable mother-in-law. 'The dogs are got aboard last. They scuffle, howl and whine like a roomful of unmanageable children and are evidently uneasy at the rocking of the boat. The sea is still rough in the aftermath of the last storm. When the incoming ocean swell meets the current at the river mouth a small boat dances like a nutshell. While the dogs, distressed by the tossing boat, huddle together in a ball, the women fly apart in all directions and bend over the gunwhale with faces as grey as chalk.'

The headstrong young Norwegian was not long in recognising the wisdom of his Churchill friends in warning him of the danger attending an autumn cruise with a scratch crew in an overloaded boat. His Eskimo pilot, going by the name of Donald, was a good boatman who appreciated the need of plenty of sea room on so dangerous a coast, but let himself be influenced by passengers and crew who feared to lose sight of land. In consequence, after playing Russian roulette for eleven days with shoals, reefs and a lee shore, the expedition was irretrievably wrecked — with no fatality, but with the loss of the boat and of a great part of the stores she carried.

On 11 October, the first night afloat, Leden wrote: 'About 1 a.m. I awake, for in the groundswell the boat's keel is repeatedly touching bottom. I am out of my bag in a moment. Close at hand I hear the roar of surf. It is breaking over great round rocks only a few metres away on either side of the boat. One anchor is already out. The whole crew is snoring. "Okalek" I cry with all the power of my lungs. "Illatnak!" They keep on snoring. A swelling wave lifts the boat which sustains a fresh shock and cracks in every joint. . . . At last I succeed in waking Donald; he goes from one man to the next and shakes them all into consciousness.

'The tide is on the ebb. The boat is aground and starting to list. No time to lose, since for the heavily laden boat to fall over would take the side right out of her. At last the men are on their feet. By good luck we have a few stout, long poles. In a twinkling these are fixed with one end on the ground, the other wedged against the boat's side to prop her up. If they support us the boat will remain as she is until high water comes and sets us afloat. These sharp cracks! Do they come from the poles or the side of the boat? A pole gives way. We set another in place. This time it holds and we breathe again. We have . . . surmounted the greatest danger. The tide recedes; more and more rocks appear. They look uncanny in the darkness, and appear like great ghostly shapes and sea monsters which raise their heads above water to bewitch us with malignant stares.

'A man is set to watch; the others go back to sleep until early dawn.

'When I again crawl out of my sleeping-bag we are resting on dry ground and all around light fog, no water as far as the eye can see. The sound of the surf is barely audible. Far to the east very faintly one hears the murmur of the ocean swell. And so here we are, a long way above low-water mark.

'"What has happened? Where is the water?" ask the children one after another as they awake rubbing their eyes. . . .

'Old Donald asserts that there are places on the west shore of Hudson Bay where even in clear weather — not such as it is today — a man standing on the high-water line cannot see as far as the low-water mark. Though this sounds incredible, it is perfectly true, for the coast is very flat and the distance between the water lines of ebb and flood extraordinarily great. Luckily our keel is resting on the little sandbank, the only one of its kind as far as we can see, on the rock-infested shoreline. If we had grounded amongst the rocks we would have suffered total shipwreck. . . . We shiver in the morning chill. . . . The men appointed to the night watch explained that near midnight it had fallen calm and as the current was driving the boat landwards they dropped

*A view of the dangerous coast line of Hudson Bay, near Churchill.*

an anchor and went to sleep without assurance that it had taken hold. . . .

'The roar of the surf now sounds more loudly and nearer at hand . . . though we cannot yet see the advancing tide. At last the water becomes visible and advancing perceptibly. Soon the hull begins to right itself and the prop falls. The boat is afloat once more. . . .

'To extricate ourselves in this thick fog is no easy matter. To find our way we observe the current and listen for the sound of surf. . . . With one man heaving the lead and another as lookout we glide slowly seawards. The fog remains impenetrable. We take soundings continually: we are in deeper water — 4½ metres — 7½ metres, at last 9 metres. We are lucky. We slip out between two rocks on which the breakers are plunging.

'October 2

'Assuredly we need no longer grumble for want of wind. Spray is dashing over us and drenching us to the skin. The fog is driven away by the storm and the shore is visible. I cannot look at it without a shudder. . . . Where we lay at anchor last night the surf is bursting over the jagged reefs and rocks.'

As the gale rises to hurricane force, Donald, who knows the coast well, pilots the boat landwards into a haven — to safety but not to comfort. 'The water begins to rise. We seem to have come in on the ebb. Even in harbour we soon observe the power of the hurricane. . . . A storm from the north-east has, as I have mentioned, great influence on the tides. . . . The sea rises fast and soon converts what we thought good dry land into a foaming waste of banks and shoals.'

For some time, too, the wayfarers were in acute distress for want of fresh water. They remained weather-bound for four days.

'October 4

'I study the landscape carefully and find some driftwood which seems to come from some boat or schooner. Farther north I find graves quite different from the regular Eskimo type. Wandering farther on I come upon an abandoned tenting-place. The irregular arrangement of the stones shows that it was Whites, not Eskimos, who encamped here. Finally I discover the ruins of a stone wall, apparently the remains of a food depot. God knows what sort of a tragedy it represents. Mutiny? Shipwreck? Scurvy? Reciprocal cannibalism? Murdered by hostile Eskimos? The tokens of the tragedy are driftwood from a wreck, the ragged remains of tents set up by Whites, the ruins of a sort of provision depot, four graves.

'When I tell the Eskimos of this find, they answer, "Ammiasuk". (Can't say — we don't know.)

'October 5

'The swell rolls, the surf rumbles, although after three days the roar of the hurricane has died down. We must camp here today also. The sea is still so rough that it is out of the question to get the boat out of the harbour in the teeth of the swell. . . .

'My numerous instruments have already procured me the reputation of a great *angakok* or medicine man. We have an angakok aboard, and he is plainly afraid that I may queer his magic and ruin his business. . . .

'At midday the sun peers through the clouds and I cannot refrain from taking an observation. . . . The medicine man makes a threatening gesture towards the sextant. He seems to mean it and to be really hostile.

'Towards evening the wind increases and it begins to snow. I call a council of war with Donald and urge

him to keep at a greater distance from this dangerous coast lest we run aground again. The medicine man and others thrust themselves into the debate and object to steering farther seawards. Donald is plainly unwilling to oppose the wishes of his countrymen and alters course only very slightly.'

In his entry for 7 October Leden complains that 'these landlubbers' steered nearer to land while he slept. Hull, sails and tackle area are badly iced. 'It is the medicine man's conviction that the cause of gale and snowdrift is my sextant and my sextant alone.

'The Eskimos are most eager to land again. Old Donald turns his anxious gaze back and forth along the shoreline, seeking any sort of harbour. . . . He has the same luck as before, and steers us in past rocks and pounding surf.'

On the next day (October 9) they are at sea again — for the last time.

'We are cheered by bright sunshine. Perhaps we may reach Akskarnik (Chesterfield) before the sea freezes. I must take advantage of a clear sky for a sun shot and determine exactly where we are. Craftily and furtively I grope in my instrument case in the hope of fishing out my sextant while no one is looking. But the master magician is eyeing me sideways without intermission and follows every movement I make. Scarcely have I opened the case and laid my hand on the sextant when he murmurs an incantation and makes so hideous a face that all men look at me with alarm. Even Donald, who normally seems less superstitious than the rest, looks grave and worried. So I slam the chest shut and try to give the impression that I had been merely checking my instruments to make sure that they had suffered no damage in the storm.'

The sun is suddenly obscured by dark threatening clouds and in a series of violent squalls all sail but the merest rag is taken in.

'And now chaos ensues. . . . For a while it blows from the south-west and then wheels to the north-east. The wind hollows out depths in the sea and raises waves. We all anxiously peer towards land though that here no port is to be found. We are in real distress: the boat is beginning to take in water. . . . Only two men can at a time work the pump. . . . The sky grows ever darker. Snow comes thicker and thicker: soon we can see barely two boat lengths ahead. The roar of wind and sea is all around us. . . . A great wave breaks on board. . . . One or two are all but washed overboard. We clutch at the lashings of the tarpaulin covering the freight and hang on for dear life. Another wave strikes — the boat is heaved up and thrown on its side and by a miracle the greater part of the water shipped is spilled overboard again. . . . We take turns at the pump and toil with the energy of which only those are capable who are fighting for their lives.

'The sea boils and foams: in the raging of the hurricane it raises a mist of spray. Hold on tight! Another great wave comes thundering over us. Aground on a shoal! This *is* the end. A shriek from the women pierces me to the marrow. The waves smash against the boat and shake it like raging devils. It is lifted up and shot forward as if by an explosion of dynamite. We are back in deep water, working at the pump as if possessed. The boat is still afloat — but for how long?'

Leden attempts no description of the actual shipwreck. It appears from a passage in his next entry that, after finding refuge in the lee of an islet, the boat was torn from its anchorage by 'the irresistable force of gale and billow' and hurled into the rock-strewn shallows of the mainland shore.

'October 11

'A handful of men in sodden fur garments are fighting for their lives with the strength of despair. In blizzard and darkness, and burdened with chests and furs, they painfully pick their way over rock-strewn shallows, through surf and spray from the wreck to a bleak and forbidding shore. . . .

'The surf roars like a chorus of devils and the hurricane pitilessly lashes the eyes of the tortured men with driving snow pellets. They toil under their burden, stagger through the unceasing coming and going of the waves, over smooth and slippery rocks; bruised and bloody from stumbling they always recover and labour ever forwards.

'The grey dawn glimmers and puts an end to that night of horror. The throng, hungry and almost dead from exhaustion, clench their teeth and renew the fight — eight hours long and without intermission.

'Most of the provisions have gone overboard. Much of the equipment was ruined even before the little boat, after a long and bitter struggle, was lifted up by a mighty wave and tossed into its last anchorage.

'The scanty remains of food and equipment are treated with as much reverence as if they were the Communion Cup and the Host. When the last pieces have been brought to land and stacked in a dismal heap, sails and tarpaulin are drawn over them and carefully weighted down with stones.

'With superhuman exertions we try to haul the wreck out of the surf and onto the beach. Only one single anchor is left to us, and that the smallest of the three. The large anchor with its stout cable lies far out on the sea bottom in the lee of an islet — a dumb witness to the irresistible force of gale and billow.

'The numerous holes in the boat's bottom and on one side are proof that she struck several times until she was finally hurled with a crash onto the mainland.

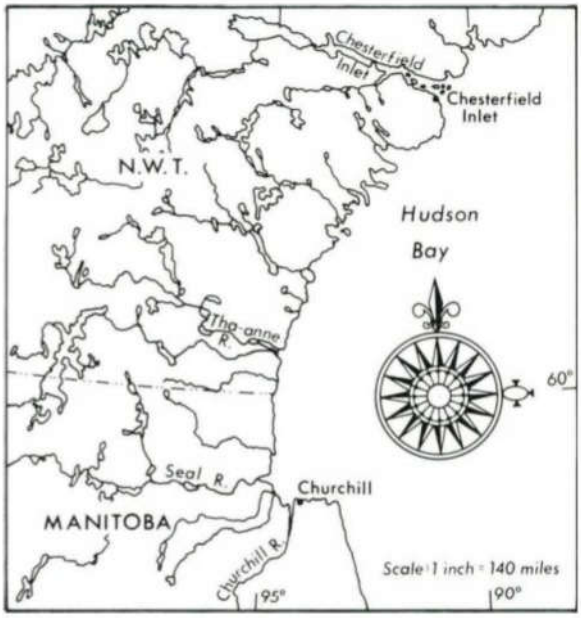
'With thongs of walrus hide made fast to a rock we tow the wreck to land. . . . It is finished at last and all that remains of boat and lading has been salvaged. Hungry and mortally tired the men draw themselves to the skin tents.'

The natives, who had embarked with the express purpose of wintering on the tundra, were content to remain where they were. Leden wished to return to Churchill and waited only until the rivers were safely ice-covered and enough snow had fallen to make the rocky terrain passable to a dog team. He obtained a sledge and six dogs and as crew, he took the Eskimo hunter Illatnak; a young stripling, Attornak; and a mixed-blood Indian and his wife. On the evening before his departure on 6 November Donald entertained the men of the camp to a banquet where the angakok made a friendly gesture which assured Leden that his earlier hostility had been dictated by religious duty, not personal malice.

In his account Leden makes no mention of the site of the shipwreck, which appears to have taken place a little to the south of the Tha-anne River estuary, some 100 miles north of Churchill. Nor does he enlighten us as to the time spent on the journey. For the first week of sledge travel he gives the daily entries in his journal, but summarizes the rest and omits the date of arrival at Churchill. He seems to have spent about two weeks on the road, following a devious course, first inland to avoid gravel beach and improve chances of meeting caribou; then forced shorewards by hills that were too steep for their overburdened dogs; then far up the great Seal River to a point where it was securely bridged by ice. They carried little but ammunition and sleeping-bags, for the Indian's wife, allegedly in feeble health, was carried on the sledge — 'whether we are traversing smooth snow and ice or toiling in agony over sand and moss'. To the Indian's honour be it said that he cared for his wife with the utmost chivalry.

Leden, for his part, conversed chiefly with team-captain Illatnak. Though he did not have with him the perfect sympathy which he was to feel for the wholly primitive people of the hinterland, he gathered some curious instances of native custom and belief.

While they were setting up camp one evening a pack of some dozen wolves appeared coming over a ridge near by. Illatnak warned Leden not to molest them. He 'declares that to attack the wolves would be extremely dangerous. A single shot, he affirms, would provoke a deadly conflict in which we four men, in spite of our good rifles, are bound to come off second best. . . . A lone Eskimo has no fear of a number of bears, but half a dozen strong, skilled hunters will not venture to attack a pack of wolves. The Indian and the Eskimos say that if they do not attack us by sundown we can rest easy until early next morning. According to them the wolf makes an attack only at




sunrise or sundown.'

When Illatnak has cut out the tongue of a caribou Leden notes, 'he rolls the carcass over so that one eye is buried in the snow, and with his *pannah* he hews out a block of snow and lays it on the other eye. "I do this because the caribou's soul must not see the wolves coming to devour his body." It is the belief of the Eskimos that the soul lingers in the body for a considerable time even after the carcass has been cut up. The spirit departs gradually, step by step.'

Some days after his last dated entry on 12 November Leden writes: 'After a long journey through clusters of willow we see ahead the spruce forest, which marks for the Eskimo the end of his world. It confronts us like a blue-green wall. . . .

'The sun is gilding the tree-tops — a glorious sight for one who has just come from the barren tundra. But our two Eskimos are ill at ease. That is no wonder, for they are not like the Padlermiut, accustomed to the sight of trees. They belong to the northern inland folk, the Karnermiut, who dwell from 350 to 500 kilometres north of here. Attornak, in particular, is half astounded and half frightened. He is only seventeen or eighteen, and sees the forest for the first time in his life.'

On the last day of the journey, when passing down the shore of Button Bay with the woods on the one hand and the sea on the other, they paused to lunch on frozen meat. The good-natured Attornak complied with the Indian's suggestion that he climb a tall spruce and break off dry branches to boil the tea kettle. In doing this he tore his aged caribou-skin clothing on ragged branch ends and his knees and other parts of his body were exposed. 'He has opened a window over his stomach and his navel smiles

*A day's freight at the mouth of the Churchill River, 1913. Centre is George Ray, Hudson's Bay Company manager of the Nelson River-York Factory District at the time of Leden's visit.*

through it' writes Leden unfeelingly. The motherly Indian woman bustled up with needle and thread to repair the damage but the bashful youth repelled her and himself stitched up his rags as best he could.

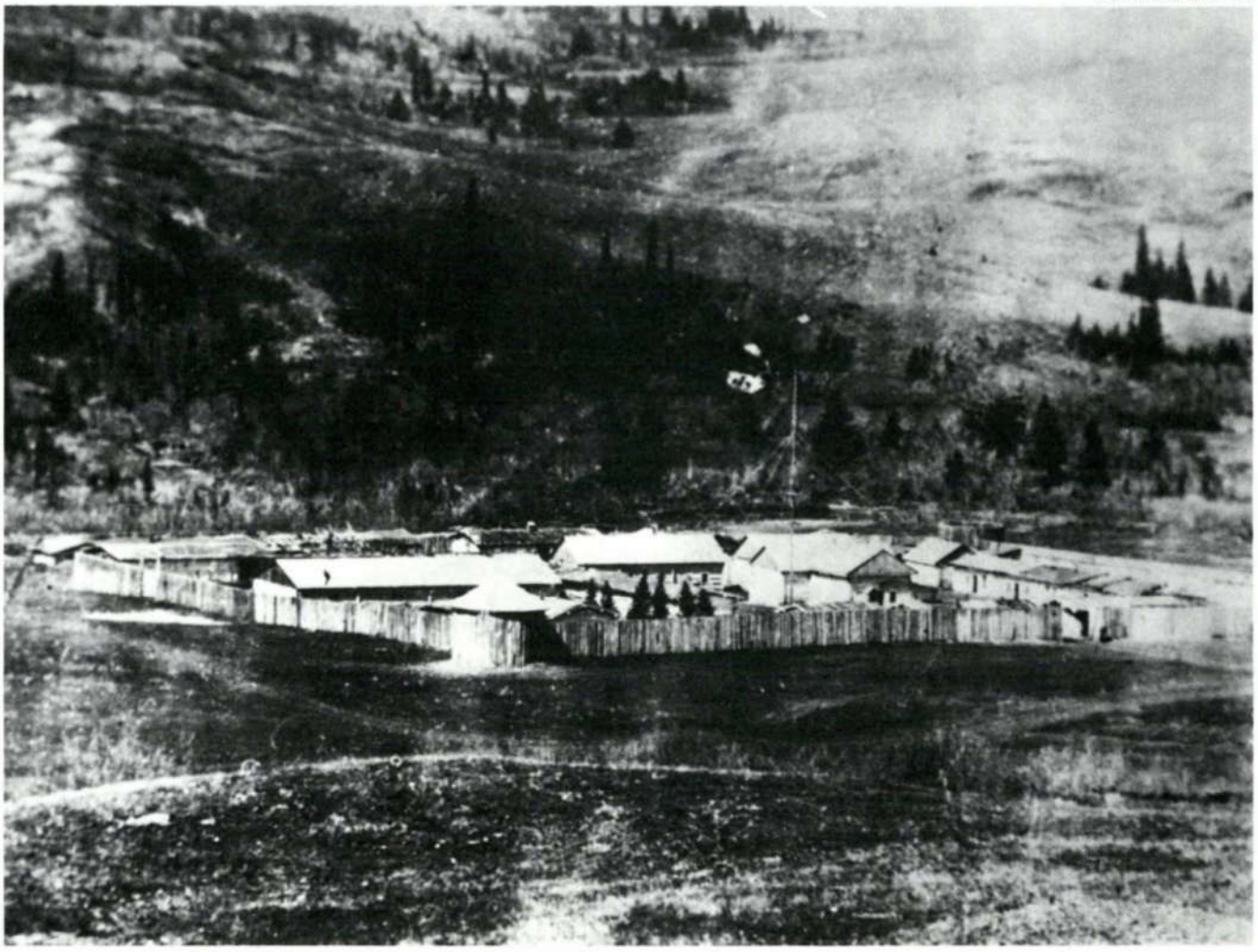
In late afternoon when the wayfarers rounded the innermost angle of Button Bay and set a course for the camp at Prince of Wales's Fort, they found the wind wheeling to the north-east and 'becoming a really cruel blizzard' which drove them to the shelter of the forest. Here the Eskimos were at a loss. The Indian, who knew the area well, promised to guide them through the woods to the trading station. But the Eskimos' sledge was not designed for the deep, loose snow of the bush. The woman dismounted; the men pushed and tugged at the sledge in an agony of sweat, until a steep hill brought them to a halt, exhausted and some four kilometres from the warmth and shelter of Churchill. 'With much expenditure of smooth words and the promise of plentiful sugar and tobacco' Leden prevailed on Illatnak to go forward alone and fetch an Indian toboggan from the fort.

Huddled together in darkness with the gale roaring overhead in the tree-tops, the others were soon assailed by fears and misgivings. The snow was too loose for the building of a shelter, and the fire they kindled was a poor substitute. With the ready consent of the woman it was agreed to tramp into Churchill with the guidance of the dogs. These had been unhitched and had been waiting passively, but when their conductors rose to move on, they too started up eagerly. Leden saw what was coming and made a dive for the nearest animal. He missed his grasp and 'the whole pack takes off in the direction of Churchill. They can scent the settlement for the wind is blowing from that quarter. They whiz over the snow like a pistol shot. . . . We try to follow their tracks, but soon lose them in the darkness.'

Leden, who was on skis, took the lead, steering with the wind 'half on our faces, half on the left'. The woman, naturally the freshest of the party, seconded him in keeping their lagging comrades on the move. Both the latter were soon much exhausted by plunging through loose snow; the young Eskimo was bewildered by the uproar in the trees, and the Indian so spent with toil that after a halt he would rise and stagger back the way he had come. Mingling encouragement with angry rebuke the Norwegian kept his party on the move for hours until he tumbled head over heels down a steep bank that could only be that of the Churchill River. The party stopped, bewildered by the sudden disappearance of the leader, until they heard his cries and scrambling down, saw through the drifting snow a light near by. This proved to come from the house of the Indian's father. Outside were the dogs and inside the hut, Illatnak was refreshing himself with a pot of tea. Leaving the natives there Leden pushed on to obtain refreshment and dry clothing at the home of the trader. There, the mortification he felt at this ignominious home-coming was relieved by the intelligence that the storm which had ruined his enterprise had wrought great havoc elsewhere. Boats had been smashed in Churchill harbour and — as he learned later — at York Factory also. But the wreck of the schooner on which he now relied for carriage to Chesterfield cast doubt on his plans for the future..

Here Leden brings the early part of his travelogue to an end. ◆

Glenbow-Alberta Archives



# Archaeology at Fort Walsh

By Jeffrey S. Murray

*Fort Walsh (pictured above) was the major commercial centre on the south-western Canadian plains prior to railway construction. At the time this photograph was taken in early 1880, the North West Mounted Police post had attained its maximum growth and expansion.*

The author is an archaeologist with Parks Canada, Winnipeg.

He is presently on educational leave to pursue graduate studies at the Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta.

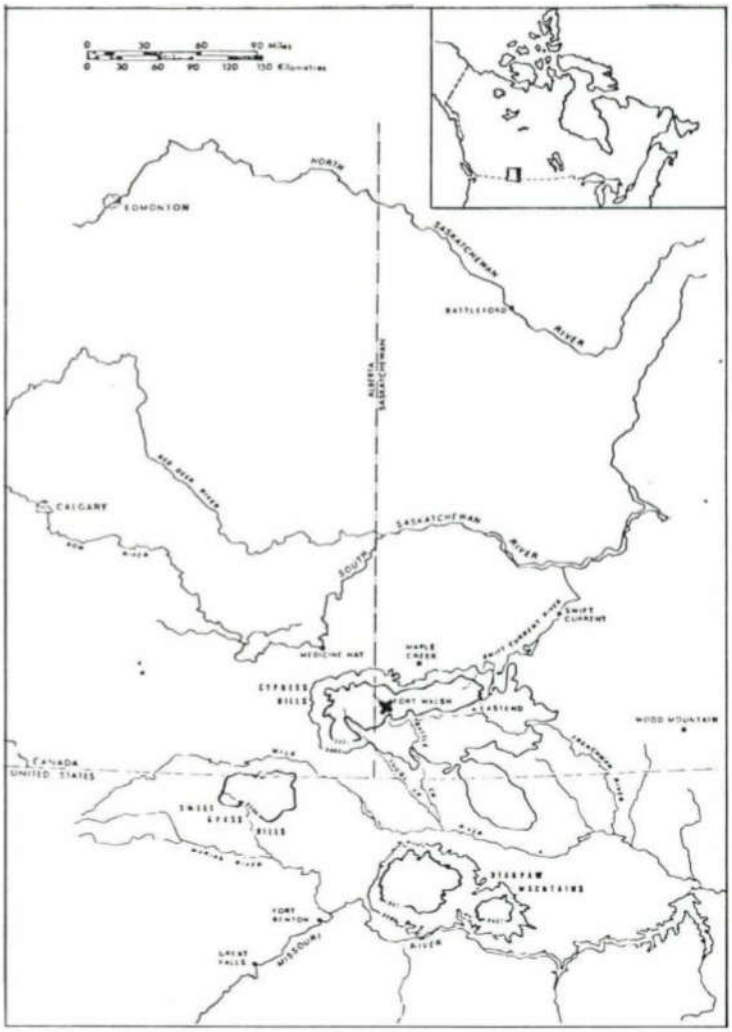
FORT WALSH in the Cypress Hills of south-west Saskatchewan was constructed in 1875, just two years after the Parliament of Canada brought the North West Mounted Police into existence. It served as the headquarters of the police force from 1877 to 1882. Together with outposts at East End, Wood Mountain, Pinto Horse, and Milk River, the fort's divisional jurisdiction extended to over 19,000 square miles of frontier.

This was a noteworthy responsibility since much of the territory, prior to the police arrival, had become a haven for American desperadoes escaping prosecution south of the international border. Two years before the establishment of the fort, the southern frontier had witnessed the bloody massacre of from twenty to thirty Assiniboine Indians by a group of American and Canadian frontiersmen. The fact that the police were able to maintain peace and order between the intrusive pioneers and local native populations in the face of such racial tension, speaks well of their ability as a law enforcement agency.

The responsibilities of the North West Mounted Police at Fort Walsh went beyond the bounds of normal police duties. The force constituted almost the entire legal system in the Northwest Territories. They arrested criminals, placed offenders on trial, and incarcerated the convicted. The police at Fort Walsh also collected customs duties, maintained contracts for mail couriers, and acted on behalf of the Indian Department in the distribution of treaty payments. In this context, the police were the main representatives of the Canadian federal government on the south-western plains and as such helped to re-establish Canadian sovereignty over an area which had been under the threat of possible American annexation since the 1850s.

Initially Fort Walsh was only a small police fort in the wilderness. It was situated to serve as an important centre in the existing trail system which extended north and south from Fort Benton on the Missouri River (the economic centre of the western plains) to Forts Calgary and Edmonton, and east and west from Fort Macleod to the Qu'Appelle Valley. The presence of a police force in the Cypress Hills stabilized hostilities between the native population and the traders, thereby opening the last major area of the plains to the fur trade. The trading activities concentrated around the fort where at least two Fort Benton entrepreneurs, I. G. Baker and T. C. Powers, established warehouses.

The Fort Benton trading ventures were unregulated and by 1878 the fur resources and the major bison herds had been significantly depleted. The police were therefore called upon to assist the local indigenous population in their constant struggle against starvation. The situation was further complicated by the arrival of 4,000 American Sioux under the leadership

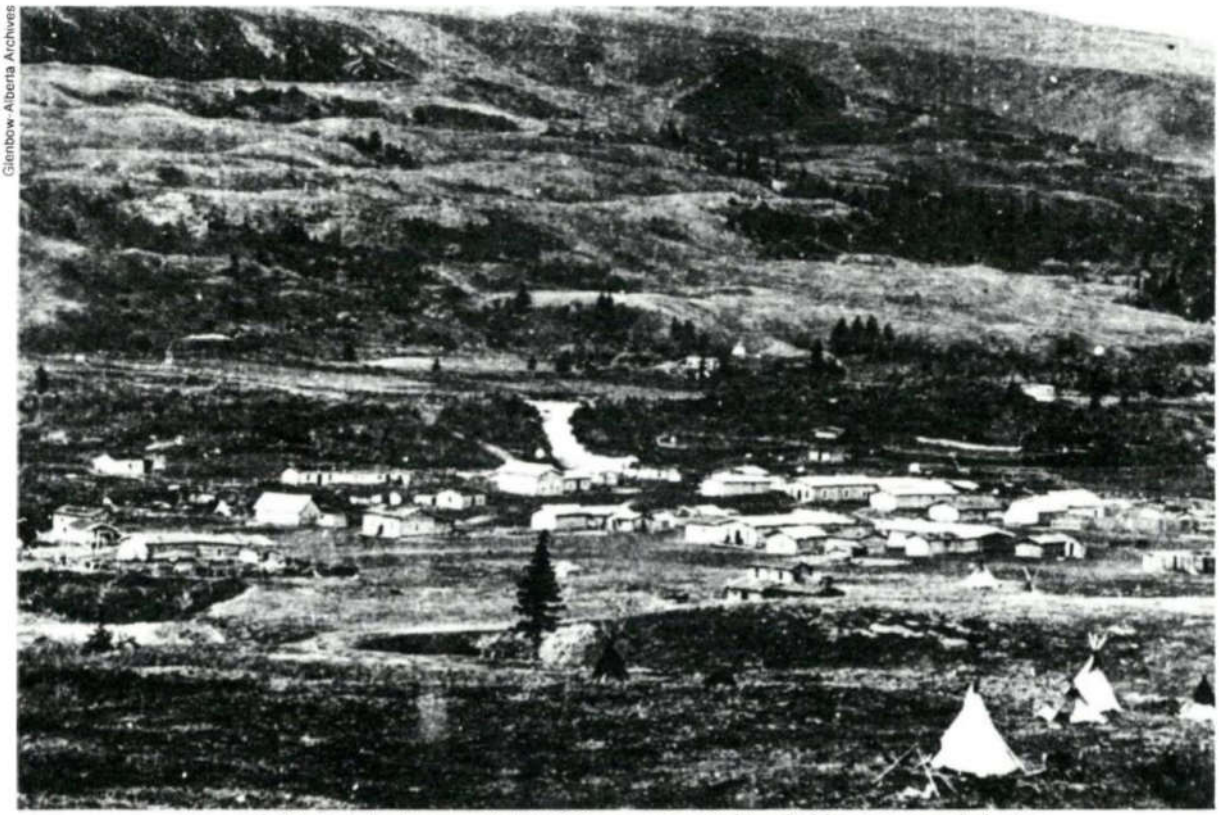



*Location of Fort Walsh in Western Canada.*

of Sitting Bull. This group had defeated General George Custer and the United States Seventh Cavalry at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, and there were concerns between the Canadian and American governments for their return. The police force was subsequently involved on behalf of the Canadian government in the international negotiations. Such developments further concentrated the scattered settlement around the fort and the adjacent town. With the increase in the police staff to meet the additional law enforcement needs of a larger population, the settlement after 1878 increasingly relied on the pay cheques of the force and the bid for police contracts. This new form of revenue for the merchants of the Cypress Hills offset losses incurred through a decline in the fur trade and provided the economic basis for the development of Fort Walsh into one of the largest frontier commercial centres of the period on the Canadian plains.

With the advance of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the conclusion of successful treaty negotiations with

Glenbow-Alberta Archives



*A town of 400, situated adjacent to the N W M P post at Fort Walsh, relied for revenue on the business of the force and government supply contracts.*

*A meeting of American Sioux at Fort Walsh in 1877. Sitting Bull and his followers sought refuge in Canada after the Battle of the Little Big Horn.*

E. Brown Collection, Provincial Archives of Alberta

the native population, and the return of Sitting Bull and his followers to the United States, priorities for law enforcement changed. By 1883 Fort Walsh was no longer considered a useful administrative centre and was dismantled in favour of a new location near Maple Creek on the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

In 1968 the site of the police post and the town of Fort Walsh were acquired by Parks Canada as part of its mandate to preserve and commemorate events in Canadian history. The Parks Canada program, which centres on commemorating the role played by the N W M P in the peaceful settlement of the Canadian prairie, has focussed on reconstructing the fort as it appeared in the early 1880s, the period when Fort Walsh was at the height of its power. The project has clearly demonstrated that while the more sensational developments in the history of the post are well recorded, the common and mundane activities of frontier life are usually unmentioned. In some cases, such deficiencies in the archival records present formidable obstacles in interpreting the site to the public, since the researcher is left with a less than complete portrayal of the life and times of the period. The problems of using archival records only to interpret past events at Fort Walsh are further intensified by the surviving photographs, sketches, and journals which provide only minimal evidence of the techniques used in the construction of the post, its ground layout, and building architecture. Archaeological research, with its emphasis on man's material remains as excavated from the ground, was therefore undertaken to validate and supplement the historical record and to provide an accurate picture of everyday life.

The work of an archaeologist is a destructive process in that it is impossible to return excavated material to its original position in the ground. Consequently, techniques used to record the excavations are particularly important if the data is to be preserved.

At the Fort Walsh excavation, a grid system was surveyed across each North West Mounted Police building site. After the artifacts or structural remains were eventually removed from the ground, it was possible to relate the find to its original horizontal and vertical position, and thereby ensure an accurate reconstruction.

In one instance, the excavation of scrap leather and associated tools, including awls and needles, identified the presence of leather-working activities at the fort, and the location of the shoemaker's shop and saddlery.

In addition to locating buildings not documented in the historical records, investigations have indicated that simple techniques were used in the construction of the fort. Although the building of a frontier fort

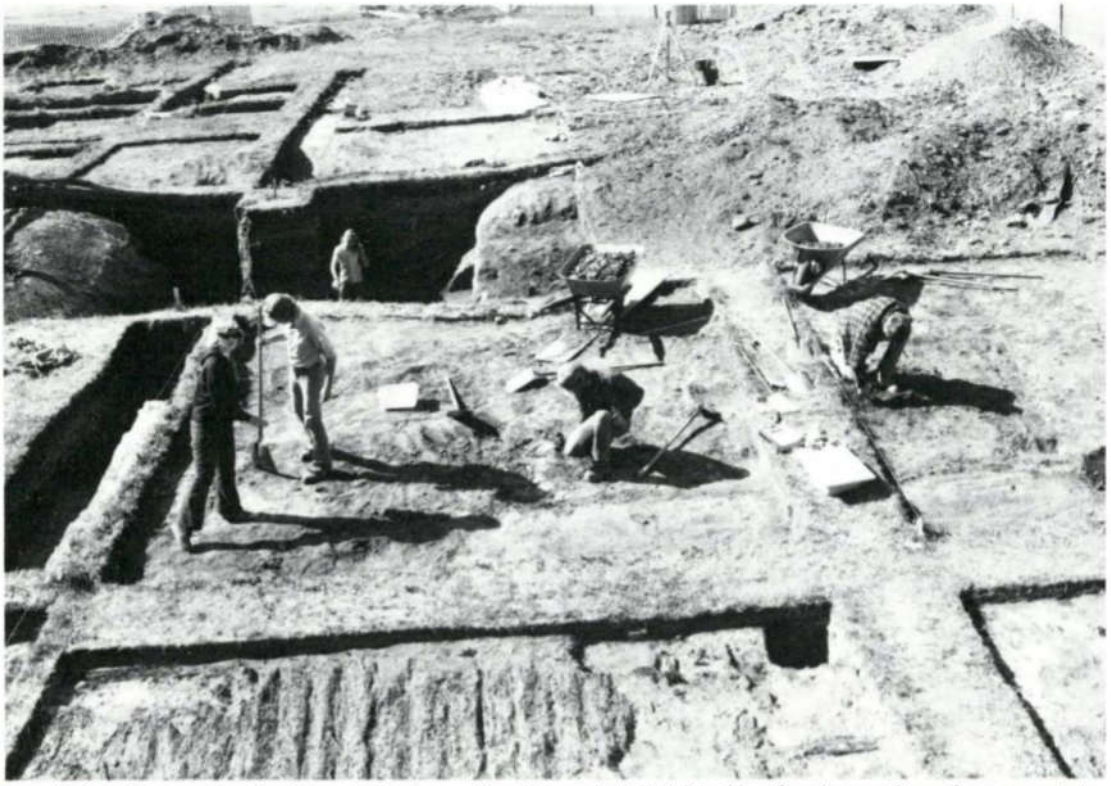
RCMP Museum, Regina, Saskatchewan

*Superintendent James M. Walsh of the N W M P, who played a key role in negotiations for the return of Sitting Bull and his followers to the United States.*

was no easy task, relatively sophisticated methods of log construction could have been used. The police, however, did not attempt such practices. Walter Hildebrandt, a historian with Parks Canada, Winnipeg, interprets the simple building methods as a response to functional efficiency. The police were required to keep expenses to a minimum; they used only local building materials and lacked trained carpenters on their work force. Possibly these factors contributed to the makeshift appearance of the post.

All structures at Fort Walsh were single storey and built from skinned, unshaped logs, chinked with sand and clay. The residential buildings and warehouses were built with the logs laid horizontally and the corners saddle-notched. The stables and privies, on the other hand, were generally constructed from upright logs placed side-by-side in a shallow footing trench. In all cases, the buildings were set directly on the ground without the benefit of raised foundations. Usually the ground was not levelled prior to construction, so that the flooring of some structures occasionally sloped as much as 30 centimetres.

B. Fleming, Parks Canada



*Archaeologists use handtools to strip thin layers of earth from the N W M P building foundations. Over a five-year period forty-two of the buildings at Fort Walsh were excavated, and some 150,000 artifacts recovered.*

*Anne Fraser and François Kense map the horizontal and vertical positions of the building foundations so that future reconstructions can be located on the original site.*

B. Fleming, Parks Canada

Lumber for the floor construction at Fort Walsh was pit-sawn by the enlisted men who earned extra pay for the work. However, the excavations clearly indicate that some buildings, such as the veterinarian's office and the one room in the officers' divisional stores complex, were not provided with a wooden floor until well after the fort was established. The data suggests that cut lumber was probably at a premium for several years because of the time and labour required to produce pit-sawn boards.

The archaeologist has also confirmed that methods of roof construction generally conformed to one of two techniques. The roofs of the residential buildings and workshops were low pitched, and built from split poles laid flush from a central ridge pole to the rafters. The roofs were insulated with from eight to fifteen centimetres of clay which was then covered with overlapping planks. Diaries and reports indicate that the clay roofs did little to keep out the rain. Complaints about sickness caused by the persistent dampness were frequent and during the summer months the men actually preferred living in their tents. Storage buildings, however, were usually built with a high-pitched roof and finished with a shingled surface. The extra expense of a shingle roof was apparently justified on the grounds that the building interiors would be kept dry and there would be less spoilage of goods.

Of particular importance, archaeological research has demonstrated that, despite the popular concept of a 'wild' frontier abounding in general lawlessness, defense was not a major concern in the construction and layout of Fort Walsh. The palisade consisted merely of logs, thirteen feet in length, set vertically in a shallow footing trench. Rocks or other materials were not used to stabilize the wall base and the upper section of the palisade was secured by a single horizontal plank nailed about four feet from the top of each post. The varying log sizes and the irregular spacing of the posts probably contributed to the rustic appearance of the post. The acidic soil acting on the untreated logs rotted the base to such an extent that it was not uncommon for sections of the palisade to collapse during wind storms.

The palisade and the two corner bastions were built without firing platforms or catwalks to protect the walls during an attack; they were roofed and used primarily for grain storage. This lack of effective defense structures suggests that the police did not really expect an armed confrontation with the local population. The palisade probably functioned more as an elaborate fence to separate the post from the neighbouring civilian community and to help keep order and control over personnel.

Throughout its occupation, Fort Walsh underwent considerable expansion and renovation to accom-

*Metal artifacts analysed here by Marie Kense confirmed the location of the N W M P stable and saddlery.*

B. Fleming, Parks Canada

*Glass bottles from the excavations are catalogued by Sandra Olynyk. After cleaning, artifacts were accessioned with a coding system that identifies the exact location of each find.*

B. Fleming, Parks Canada

modate the more than 110 enlisted men garrisoned within the walls. Although increased building construction altered the original layout and shape of the fort, care was always taken to segregate different areas and buildings within the fort compound on the basis of rank. For example the residences, privies, kitchens, and mess rooms located along the east side of the fort were reserved for the exclusive use of officers, while separate facilities in the central area of the compound were used by enlisted men.

Historical research demonstrates that officers and enlisted men at Fort Walsh were recruited from families with different social and economic backgrounds. Officers generally had a university education and came from a military or professional background. The experiences of enlisted men prior to signing with the police force were usually limited to occupations in agriculture, industry, and commerce. The formal separation of these two ranks in their day-to-day activities at Fort Walsh appears to indicate that the North West Mounted Police wished to maintain social distinctions between personnel, even on the isolated frontier.

Studies of the artifacts discarded by the North West Mounted Police at the time of fort abandonment also provide reliable data to help the archaeologist describe frontier life. These studies, which have actually just begun, suggest that life styles of the officers and enlisted men differed considerably. Artifacts analysts with Parks Canada, Winnipeg, have been conducting detailed research on the Fort Walsh collection in an attempt to explain some of these differences. A study of the glass bottles from the site, for example, indicates that officers enjoyed expensive alcoholic beverages, such as wine, cognac, champagne and bottled beer, while enlisted men more frequently consumed cheaper proprietary medicines which contained a high alcoholic or narcotic content. Variability in the ceramic objects has also shown that more expensive ware types and decorations are found in contexts associated with officers rather than with enlisted men. For instance, unlike other ranks at the fort, the commissioner of the North West Mounted Police had a matching set of relatively expensive decorated tableware.

Analysts have pointed to discrepancies in pay rates and subsequent purchasing methods as possible explanations for different consumption patterns. With differences amounting to as much as 700 per cent in the pay scales, officers had the resources to purchase goods through individual order. Enlisted men could occasionally afford some luxuries, but only by pooling their funds to buy the same materials in cheaper bulk form.

Similarly, Stephen Cumbaa of the National Museum, Ottawa, has studied the animal bones representing the waste from meals consumed at the fort; these indicate that beef was the major meat source for both ranks. However, officers were more frequently served the better cuts from the hindquarters and were able to add more variety to their diet by sometimes procuring wild game. This is a particularly valuable observation, as the nature of frontier subsistence is not well documented in the historical records. Sharon Keen, of Parks Canada in Winnipeg, has initiated detailed research on nineteenth-century canning technology, partially in an effort to define contents of the tin cans excavated from the fort. Hopefully she will be able to isolate other foodstuffs which the police were using to supplement their bland diet.

Fort Walsh occupied an important position in the history of the North West Mounted Police and in the development of the western Canadian frontier. Its story suffers from a lack of sufficient archival documentation, but archaeological research, with its emphasis on studying man's material remains, is helping to complete the historical record. ◆

K. Lunn, Parks Canada

*Cognac and lager bottles (upper left) excavated from the commissioner's privy at Fort Walsh, and medicine and flavouring extract bottles (lower left) found in the enlisted men's area. It is believed bottles were discarded in the privy pits to hide evidence of liquor consumption.*

*A bottle of quality alcohol could cost an enlisted man a full week's pay; the cheaper proprietary medicines, which had a high alcoholic or narcotic content, became a popular drink with enlisted members of the force.*

G. Vandervlugt, Parks Canada

*View of the partially reconstructed Fort Walsh in Battle Creek Coulee, 1978. Present reconstructions are based on information obtained from archival documents and from the archaeological investigations.*

J. Murray, Parks Canada

# 'Herschel! The Big Town'

By Fred Bruemmer

*Author-photographer Bruemmer has travelled in the arctic countries of the world for many years. His books include 'Seasons of the Eskimo', 'The Long Hunt' and 'Encounters with Arctic Animals'.*

*Photographs are by the author unless otherwise credited.*

TODAY HERSCHEL ISLAND in summer is a lovely, peaceful place. It is a small island, roughly eight miles long and five miles wide, rising gently to a height of nearly 600 feet. Only one family now lives on Herschel. It is an island of rolling meadows, of flowers and of birds, quiet and serene. And it is an island of graves, mementos of its strange and often violent history.

At one time 80 years ago, it was, according to whom you wish to believe, 'an outpost of civilization' (Vilhjalmur Stefansson), or 'the Sodom of the Arctic' . . . inhabited by 'demons of debauchery and cruelty' (Nome newspaper, 1905). It was a 'thriving arctic metropolis' (Captain Henry Larsen), but 'the scenes of riotous drunkenness and lust which this island has witnessed have probably never been surpassed' (Reverend C. E. Whittaker). It was a place where rather staid New England ladies attended opera performances and minstrel shows, and their husbands, who tended to be 'corpulent and their hair thin' (Roald Amundsen) played whist and drank port. And to a nine-year-old Eskimo boy who saw it for the first time it was: 'Herschel! The great big town!' (Nuligak). Whatever the views, it is hard to argue with the Reverend I. O. Stringer, later Bishop of the Yukon, that this was 'a community like none other that ever existed in Canada'.

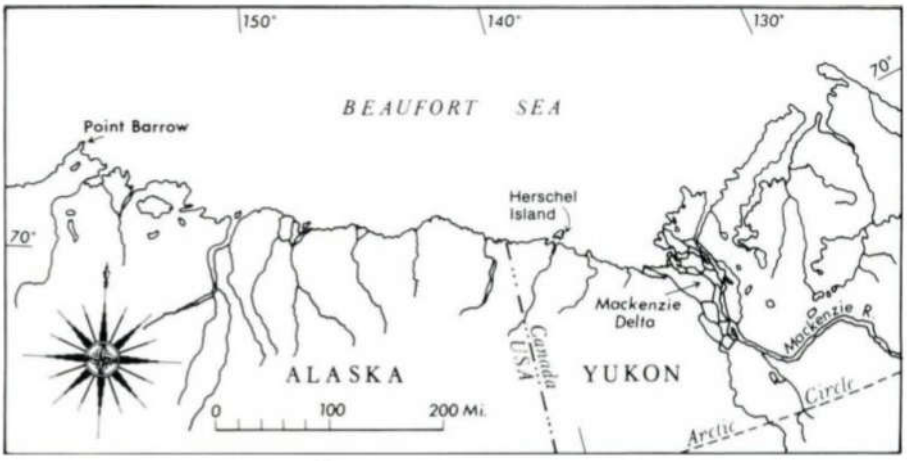
For a decade, from 1894 to 1905, Herschel Island was the whaling center of the Western Arctic and when whaling declined it became the hub of the extensive fur trade of this region.

The island was discovered in 1826. John Franklin and his men descended the Mackenzie in two open boats, then turned west to explore the unknown coast. Franklin reached the island on 17 July and named it after Sir John Frederick William Herschel, famous British astronomer and chemist, and son of the equally famous Sir William Herschel who discovered the planet Uranus and became Astronomer-Royal to King George III. Many Eskimos lived on the island and others frequently visited it, for 'it abounds with deer (caribou) and its surrounding waters afford plenty of fish'. Franklin noted its harbour, the only one along this coast; 'one of the finest harbours in all the Arctic', Stefansson described it later.

Franklin found a relatively dense population along the coast. At one spot a native flotilla set out to meet them. The startled explorers got to 73 kayaks and five umiaks and then lost count. Beechey, too, found the Alaska coast 'thickly inhabited by Esquimaux'. He also saw 'a great many black whales (bowheads) — more than I remember ever to have seen, even in Baffin Bay'.

Whaling then was already an ancient and immense industry. Reports of the new whaling ground spread fast. Within four years, 278 ships from New England were hunting whales in the northernmost Pacific and adjacent seas. Their season was short, their home ports more than 20,000 miles away. So in the ''tween season' they sailed to the Polynesian Islands, or along the coasts of Africa or China, whaling and trading. Thousands of men deserted on exotic islands. Some were adopted. Some eventually returned aboard other ships. And quite a few were eaten. In their stead whaling masters hired on, or often impressed, a vast assortment of natives. Favoured were Polynesians, superb sailors; and the Cape Verde Islanders, powerful and fearless whalers.

The bowhead of the Arctic was the whalers' favourite prey. It was colossal, slow, timid, and so fat it floated after being killed. It was swathed in blubber nearly two feet thick and could be rendered into 100 barrels of oil (at 31½ gallons each), used for street lights, lubricants, tanning and steel tempering and worth, in 1902, $15 a barrel. From the top of its cavernous mouth, larger than the average living room, hung 600 to 800 triangular baleen plates, some as long as 13 feet, weighing a total of a ton or more and worth, at the end of the nineteenth century, nearly $6 a pound. Consisting of a keratinous substance akin to horn, baleen — tough, pliable and resilient — had many uses. Bristles of hair brushes were made from it and the springs of the first typewriters, umbrella ribs and fishing rods, shoe horns, tongue scrapers and buggy whips. But its principal use was for corsets, stays, bustles and busks to keep the ladies of the day in the desired shape.




*In the early 1970s a storm toppled the wooden boards marking the graves of whalers on Herschel Island. The building in the distance was once the Anglican mission.*

Around 1900 an average bowhead was worth $10,000 and a large one up to $15,000 and that at a time when a United States factory worker earned a dollar a day and a senior merchant marine captain, $150 a month.

For a while the arctic whaling fleet prospered. Then it suffered severely from declining whale catches and triple disasters. In 1865, unaware that the war was over, the Confederate raider *Shenandoah* captured 21 Yankee whalers near Bering Strait and burned 20 of them. In 1871, 32 ships were crushed by ice off Point Belcher on the Alaska coast and in 1876, 12 whalers suffered the same fate near Point Barrow. Stoutly built as they were, the sailing ships were no match for the might of the arctic ice and not manoeuvrable enough to escape its clutches. In all, 76 vessels were lost in twelve years. Insurance rates soared. Profits dropped. It was time to seek new whaling grounds, new home ports, new methods.

San Francisco became the home port; the Beaufort Sea, last refuge of the bowhead, the new whaling ground; and steamers replaced sailing vessels. These were powerfully built ships of about 500 tons, heavily timbered and planked, and sheathed with Australian ironbark, an incredibly hard wood. The anthropologist Diamond Jenness saw the steam whaler *Belvedere* near Herschel in 1914 and although she had battered the arctic ice for 20 years 'the ironbark showed scarcely a scratch'.

Among merchantmen, whalers had a bad reputation. They derisively called them 'spouters' or 'hell-ships', and claimed that they could 'smell a whaleship twenty miles to leeward'. This was exaggerated. While 'trying out' a whale — rendering its blubber into oil in great cauldrons — the ships were wreathed in greasy black smoke. But later they were meticulously cleaned because between hunts the whalers had plenty of time. The captain's quarters on the *North Star* were certainly handsomely appointed 'the wood being of curly and birdeye maple, the door panels of French laurel, pilasters of mahogany, coving of rosewood, and other parts inlaid with black walnut and gilt, and the ceiling is painted white. The furniture is in harmony with the general fittings, and on the floor is a tapestry carpet of subdued hues.' Even the pantry 'was finished in black walnut'. The crew's quarters were, admittedly, considerably more modest.

In 1888 the whalers sent an exploratory mission from Point Barrow east, a whaleboat commanded by Joseph Tuckfield. He wintered with Eskimos near the Mackenzie Delta and returned the following year after a thousand-mile voyage in an open boat to report that whales in the Beaufort Sea 'are thick as bees'. This was electrifying news. The American revenue cutter *Thetis* promptly left to see whether Herschel Island were not by any chance in United States waters. It surveyed the island, sounded its harbour and named it Pauline Cove, and concluded that Herschel was well within Canadian territory.

In the summer of 1890, two small steamers, the *Mary D. Hume* and the *Grampus*, squeezed through the narrow lane of open water between the polar pack and the Alaska coast to spend the winter at Herschel. That winter taught the whalers a lot. At first they dressed in heavy woollen clothing because they believed 'that the natives didn't know how to keep warm'. They quickly changed their minds when the temperature dropped to -40°C. All 'adopted native dress . . . light and perfectly comfortable. . . . We never dressed otherwise from that time on for Arctic weather.'

In July the ice released the ships and from the last day of July on they caught whales 'as fast as we could handle them'. The *Mary D. Hume* killed 27, the *Grampus* 21. Laden with a fortune in baleen the *Grampus* sailed home. The *Mary D. Hume* prepared to spend a second winter at Herschel. Desperate for news from the outside world, they sent natives to Fort Yukon on the Porcupine River where the Hudson's Bay Company had a post. Half a year later the reply came. It 'consisted principally of the statement that Queen Victoria was still alive and that Lord Salisbury was still prime minister. Wonderful news for a bunch of New England Yankees who had received no mail for over twenty-six months!'

The *Mary D. Hume* took ten more whales the second summer and returned to San Francisco with a cargo worth $400,000. That did it. The rush for the Beaufort Sea was on. Soon so many whalers wintered at Herschel that their 'crews formed a colony that was larger than the population of many a town in the United States'. In 1894 the *Balaena* returned with 67 whales, the *Narwhal* with 69, each cargo worth about $500,000, or roughly five million dollars in today's terms.

The ships usually left San Francisco in early spring, sailed to Unalaska in the Aleutians, took on more coal (brought there by tender) and caught a few thousand cod. They continued north towards the receding ice to kill the odd whale and many walruses. As soon as ice permitted they landed at the Diomede Islands in Bering Strait and near native villages along the Siberian coast to buy fur clothing: 400 to 500 pairs of boots per ship (at $1 each in trade goods), parkas of reindeer pelts ($2 each), shirts of squirrel or fawn skins ($1 each), and 15 to 20 sled dogs per ship at $3 each. They also hired natives, Eskimos and Chukchi, to serve as whalers in summer and hunters in winter, and usually took their families along. As a rule, they were brought home on the return voyage a year or two later. Sometimes fall storms prevented this and the natives ended up in San Francisco or, on a few occasions, in Japan and Hawaii.

In August the ships usually managed to reach

Old Dartmouth Historical Society Whaling Museum

*Whaling ships at Pauline Cove, Herschel Island, winter of 1893-94. A water-colour by John Bertonccini, known as 'Johnny the Artist' to the whalers. The ships, left to right, are 'Mary D. Hume', 'Newport', 'Grampus' (background), 'Jeanette' (foreground), 'Narwhal', 'Karluck' and 'Balaena'.*

Herschel Island (5,000 miles from San Francisco), hurriedly unloaded a portion of their supplies into larger warehouses that had been built ashore, and continued east to hunt whales. In September, before freeze-up, they returned to Herschel. They hacked and blasted ten-foot-deep holes into the permafrost, roofed them with driftwood logs and sod and stored perishable food in these ice cellars (two are still in perfect condition today). They collected the abundant driftwood, first on the island, later along the mainland coast, at least 100 cords per ship. They cut fresh-water ice in a lake two miles from Pauline Cove as their winter water supply. Once the ships were frozen in, they housed them over with lumber and canvas, covered this with a layer of sod and later banked the ships with ten to twelve feet of snow so that with stoves blazing it was warm on deck as well as below, and then settled down for the long winter until the ice released the ships again around mid-July.

In 1894-95, 15 ships wintered at Herschel Island, with about 1,000 whalers and 1,000 natives. As told by the captains, several of whom had their families along, the season passed pleasantly. On 16 October, the officers and ladies attended an elaborate birthday party given by Captain and Mrs Sherman for their son Bertie — aged three. The *Beluga* was 'specially fitted for entertainments' with stage and auditorium, and officers and crew enjoyed performances by the 'Original Christy Minstrels of Herschel Island'. The ladies gave *soirées musicales* aboard their ships; the captains frequently played whist and drank port in the comfort of their cabins, or billiards in the living room of the large community building ashore (built in 1893) which the crews, too, were permitted to use 'one or two evenings a week'. Elaborately scripted invitations were sent from ship to ship nearly each week 'for supper and dance aboard some of the vessels', or for a fancy dress ball. Ladies, admittedly, were in short supply. 'For a partner in the Virginia Reel I had Miss Dorothy Porter aged 5 years', Captain John McInnis recalled.

At Christmas a magnificent party was held and gifts were exchanged, the ladies 'being the recipients of many useful articles'. One week later 'they danced the old year out and the new year in aboard the *Beluga*' and on New Year's Day attended 'an entertainment by Fay's celebrated opera'. Outside it was -35°C. One badly frost-bitten sailor died.

On Sundays Reverend Stringer held divine service which 'was largely attended', usually in the billiard

*The community building constructed in 1893. Here the officers played billiards and Sunday services were held until the mission was built. In the foreground is rusting machinery from the whaling days.*

room of the community house. In spring Mrs Sherman gave birth to a daughter and 'the American ensign was displayed from the peaks of all vessels in honour of the event'. The baby was baptized Helen Herschel. As the days grew longer and the weather warmer, tobogganing and skiing became favourite diversions and often more than 100 ladies, officers and men slid down the glistening slopes 'amidst great merriment'. In early summer the ladies went for picnics. Once they had to return in great haste because 'a cloud of mosquitoes had burst upon them'.

The odd sour note does creep into these pleasing accounts of winter life on Herschel. Captain Weeks of the *Thrasher* fell into the hold and died. He was kept during winter in one of the ice cellars. In summer the body was pickled in brine and shipped home. The blacksmith of the *Navarch* 'died of consumption'. And on 20 January in the midst of a 'surprise party' aboard the *Beluga*, just as everyone was sitting down to a 'substantial supper', an Eskimo burst in to report that seven crewmen had deserted, taking with them dogs, sleds, guns, and provisions.

These were minor disturbances in a life that otherwise sounds pleasant, proper, and rather genteel. It certainly does not evoke visions of a 'Sodom of the Arctic' where, according to one lurid account, 'rum flowed like water' in one long 'Bacchanalian orgy', and 'fighting, drinking and debauchery . . . [were] the order of the day.' Nor does it fit the description of 'many whaling skippers' by the eminent naval historian Samuel Eliot Morison as 'coldblooded, heartless fiends'.

Just what went on at Herschel Island while the captains dined and danced is a bit hard to determine because of a compact made by the officers to 'keep their mouths shut when they went South'. Even visitors to Herschel are not always of great help. They were usually treated with the utmost kindness and courtesy by the whaling captains and felt indebted to them. Wrote Roald Amundsen: 'I prefer not to mention the many and queer tales I heard during my sojourn' at Herschel Island (1905-1906).

The captains and their chief officers were, as a rule, New Englanders; the mates often Scandinavians; subordinate officers, usually Cape Verde Islanders; the crews, from all over the world. The captains may have been portly, balding and middle-aged, but they were also tough, courageous, and determined, and they came prepared for trouble. Ship's stores included about 40 pairs of handcuffs. On Herschel

Island, said Reverend Whittaker, the Anglican missionary, 'their word was law, without any court of appeal'.

In the spring of 1906 the crew of the *Bowhead* mutinied, perhaps with some justification. They had then been in the Arctic for 40 months. Captain Cook, assisted only by Mr Lee, his fourth mate, clapped 17 of them in irons. There was a 'little bloodshed' in overcoming 'some resistance which could not be tolerated' since it was a question of 'to rule or be ruled. If we were to be ruled by that class, we had much better be dead.' After a while on 'bread and water' a very humble crew promised total obedience 'toward those in authority'.

The crews were a motley lot and their reasons for going north diverse. Some joined voyage after voyage because they liked the life, they liked the work, and they liked the North. When whaling declined, many of these men remained in the North as traders or trappers. They often married Eskimo women and their descendants still live in Alaska and the western Canadian Arctic. Some signed up in hopes of big money — usually a doomed hope since under the whalers' share system the odds were heavily stacked in favour of owners and officers. On an exceptionally successful trip they might make a few hundred dollars; as a rule they earned less than $100 a year; and often they received only one dollar for one or two years of hard and dangerous work.

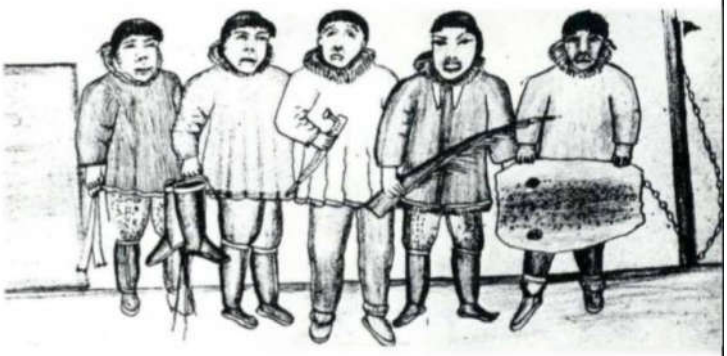
They went for adventure or perhaps to escape the law, or to jump ship and make their fortune in the goldfields of the Klondike and Nome. Many, according to Whittaker, 'were engaged while more or less drunk, through the offices of boarding house keepers in [San Francisco] who received a bounty per man.' To make these 'dregs of mankind' into sailors and whalers, said the veteran whaling captain William Fish William, 'took a lot of energy and profanity'.

The basic problem with the crews on Herschel Island was the combination of an eight-month winter, idleness, and liquor. In winter the men had little to do. They chopped wood and hauled ice. The officers encouraged sports 'which helped to keep them from worse', but mid-winter weather put a damper on such activities. Once while a group of whalers was playing baseball, one of Herschel's notoriously violent blizzards burst upon them. 'Only two managed to reach the safety of the ships.'

That left liquor and women as the main forms of recreation. 'There were drinking bouts almost every day', Nuligak recalled. Henry Larsen, the famous captain of the R C M P ship *St Roch*, who spent years in that region, said many whalers 'moved in with Eskimo women, and a period of wenching and home-brewing followed that is still remembered in the north.' The officers looked the other way or did

Old Dartmouth Historical Society Whaling Museum

*These sketches of whaling activities are believed to have been done by an Inuit girl at the Barrow mission station, c. 1899.*



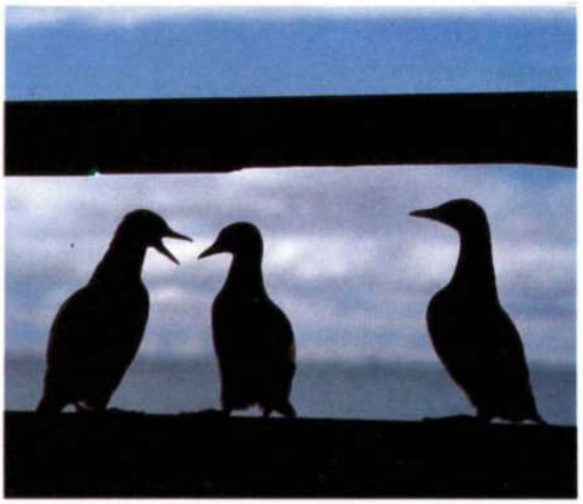
likewise. A report to the Canadian government states that there were 15 huts ashore, warmly insulated and heated, and 'used in winter by the officers . . . who nearly all keep a woman'. And the petty officers, noted Whittaker 'depended upon local women and girls for their pleasure. Intoxicants was one of the means of enticement.' Drunken parties often ended in brawls, occasionally in murder.

While many whalers were perhaps wild and depraved, Nuligak in his reminiscenses remembers them more as friends than as fiends. The whalers 'knew a hundred different ways of amusing themselves. They had different kinds of musical instruments . . . White men and Inuit played games together, as well as hunting side by side. We played baseball and wrestled. We danced in the Eskimo fashion to the sound of many drums.'

Perhaps the fairest assessment was made by Captain Larsen: 'One should not judge these people too harshly . . . To the Eskimos this was an entirely new world opening up and the whalers themselves were often simple people who were unaware of the lasting damage they were causing.'

That damage was catastrophic. Until the whalers came the Eskimos, as the explorer Hanbury

*Driftwood logs on Herschel's beach, and beyond, the old Anglican mission.*



*A colony of black guillemots now inhabits the mission building. Here, engaged in conversation, they sit in the frame of a broken window.*

observed, enjoyed 'the best of health'. The region was rich in game, the population relatively dense. The 2,500 Eskimos who inhabited the area had little contact with the outside world. Once a year they went on a trading trip to the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort McPherson to exchange furs for guns, ammunition, needles, pots, and a few other articles. Then the whalers came. To the Eskimos they were fascinating and infinitely rich. Their ships were laden with treasure. The whalers needed hundreds of tons of meat to feed their crews. They paid for it with trade goods, with useful articles such as guns, pots, knives, and hatchets, but also with less essential items such as chewing gum, suspenders, cigars, canned milk and often, despite official interdicts, with liquor.

The whalers brought diseases to which the hitherto isolated Eskimos had no immunity. Syphilis and consumption, two common sailors' afflictions, spread with devastating speed. In 1902 measles broke out and on Herschel, said Reverend Whittaker, 'funerals followed day after day'. When the disease had run its course, there were but a 'handful' of people, Nuligak recalled. Within two decades, 90 per cent of the Mackenzie Eskimos were dead.

Into the vacuum created by their demise, and lured thither by the wealth and enticements offered by the whalers, came other Eskimos from an immense region: Nunatagmiut from inland Alaska, Kinugmiut from the Seward Peninsula, Yuit and Chukchi from Siberia, even people from far-away St Lawrence Island. They mixed with the whalers. In 1905 Amundsen noted that 'a pure Eskimo type is exceedingly rare among them'. By 1934, said Diamond Jenness, 'not more than fifteen Mackenzie natives could claim descent from the original population.'

The population changed and so did its culture and

Anglican Church of Canada, General Synod Archives

*Bishop I. O. Stringer and Mrs Stringer at Herschel Island, 1899.*

its way of life. Around 1900, Nuligak recalled, the 900-yard beach at the Kittigazuit beluga-hunting camp was covered with kayaks. Eleven years later, the Eskimos 'were not using their kayaks any more; instead they hunted with wooden whaling boats'. Until the whalers came, the Eskimos lived in quite large driftwood and sod houses that Stefansson praised as warm, well-ventilated and healthy. In 1906, on Herschel Island, Amundsen saw them 'in poor, low, little wooden huts . . . They do not look very healthy'. The whalers had been quick to appreciate the superiority of native fur clothing in winter, and the importance of fresh meat and fat. The Eskimos supplied both while, ironically, adopting to

*Grave of R N W M P Constable A. Lamont who died on Herschel in 1918 of typhoid.*

a large extent white man's food and clothing, much less suited to life in the Arctic. By 1905 Amundsen found the Eskimos at Herschel had become so dependent upon European food 'that if they cannot obtain it they deem it a great hardship' and in 1915 Stefansson noted the Eskimos 'are so poorly clad that they are unable to hunt seal in winter'.

They also acquired many of the white man's mores and his language, first the strange whalers' jargon and later English. When Joe Panipakuttuk of Pond Inlet travelled with his family aboard the *St Roch* in 1944 from Baffin Island to Herschel (where he spent a year) 'it was the first time I ever heard Eskimos talk English.' He was equally startled by the fact that the local people insisted on paying him for meat and dogs. '. . . that was the first time I found out that Eskimos buy things from other Eskimos for money'.

The whalers destroyed much of the Western Arctic's wildlife wealth. In two winters, 1897-98 and 1898-99, the *Beluga* alone bought 47,000 pounds of meat from the Eskimos whom they supplied with guns and ammunition. On the average, each ship required at least 10,000 pounds of meat per season. In some years nearly 200,000 pounds of meat, mainly caribou, were brought to the ships, and this consisted primarily of saddles and haunches. The Eskimos and their sled dogs ate the rest. Caribou, muskox, moose, even Dall sheep were slaughtered indiscriminately. In fall and winter, ships' officers shot thousands of ptarmigan and hares; in spring and early summer, tens of thousands of ducks, geese and swans. And, of course, they killed the whales. When the whalers finally went, they left a sea and a land despoiled. 'The district west of the Mackenzie is now practically free from caribou', the Royal North West Mounted Police reported in 1914.

To convert the Eskimos and mitigate, if possible, the corrupting influence of the whalers, the Anglican missionary I. O. Stringer came to Herschel in 1893. Seven ships were wintering in Pauline Cove. He was amazed by the number of buildings and people: 'One can hardly realize that this is the Arctic Ocean.' Stringer was a tall man, forthright and devout. Even Charlie Klengenberg, who had little use for missionaries, liked him: 'He was a fighter who put the fear of the Lord into several who were the better for it.' It was an uphill battle. The Eskimos knew the term 'God' only as a frequently used swear word. Stringer preached his first simple sermons, helped by an Eskimo interpreter named David Copperfield.

In 1895, he warned the captains that if they and their dissolute crews did not mend their ways, retribution might come, if not from God, then at least from Ottawa. Abashed, the captains collected $600 for a mission. The next year Stringer, newly married, returned with his bride to open the first mission on Herschel Island. He held divine service for whalers and Eskimos, taught the children, and translated the Bible into Eskimo. Mrs Stringer gave singing lessons and taught shorthand. Five whalers took the shorthand course, hoping to get clerical positions in San Francisco. Reverend and Mrs Stringer remained on Herschel until 1901, then returned south aboard the *Narwhal*, together with their children, Rowena and Herschel, both born in the Arctic.

His place was taken by C. E. Whittaker, 'a real English sportsman, tall, slim and powerful'. Life was hard for him and his family. Amundsen met the Whittakers on Herschel in 1905, liked them and was enchanted by their two girls, 'exceptionally pretty children', who spoke fluent Eskimo. When he met the Whittakers again next spring, the younger girl was dead. 'It was a touching sight to see the parents carrying the little one with them on a sledge as they left the island.'

Herschel Island then was really an American enclave. The United States flag flew from buildings and ships. American captains ruled whalers and Eskimos alike. Their word was Herschel's only law, and this fact irked Ottawa. An additional cause for worry was the fact that Otto Sverdrup, after exploring between 1898 and 1902 great areas of Canada's Arctic, had just claimed 100,000 square miles of it for his native Norway. Alarmed, Ottawa sent a detachment of North West Mounted Police to Herschel Island in 1903 and another, the same year, to Fullerton, the American whaling center in northwest Hudson Bay. When the whaling fleet arrived in August, two scarlet-coated officers, Sergeant F. J. Fitzgerald and Constable F. D. Sutherland, greeted the whalers on Herschel's beach and politely informed them that henceforth they were the law. The change did not sit too well with the autocratic captains, but they bowed to the inevitable with reasonably good

grace, paid duty on imported goods and told their crews to behave.

Fitzgerald was cool and competent, 'a man of great courage,' said Stefansson. He confiscated liquor and smashed stills. When a drunken Eskimo, incited by angry whalers, went after him with a rifle, he calmly took the gun away, marched the Eskimo home and told him to sleep it off. When a whaler attacked him, he knocked him out and lugged him to his ship, where a duly impressed captain put the man in irons. He used such a skilful combination of firmness and tact, that neither crews nor captains, unfamiliar with Canadian law, were aware that his calm assumption of authority was largely bluff. To his superiors Fitzgerald reported: '. . . it would not do to let them know that I cannot punish them. They think that I have the same powers as the officers of their revenue cutters. If they once found out that I could only make a report, I am afraid plenty of liquor would come ashore. As it is, they are very careful.'

Eight years later, while carrying the winter mail to Dawson by dog team, Fitzgerald and three companions were pinned down by a blizzard so terrible and prolonged, they starved to death.

By 1905, whaling was on the wane. 'The whales, from being hunted so hard, were shy and hard to approach,' noted Captain Bodfish. Petroleum replaced whale oil, featherbone and the newly invented spring steel supplanted baleen. Within three years its price dropped from $5 per pound to 40 cents. In 1908-09 not a single ship wintered at Herschel. Most natives were dead or had left. Suddenly Herschel Island had become, according to Fitzgerald 'one of the most lonesome places in the north'.

P. A. Chester, HBC Collection

The whalers quit or became traders. Fur prices soared and Herschel, in the new guise of a trading center, took a new lease on life. In 1908 fox pelts sold for $2.50, muskrat pelts for a few cents. Ten years later, muskrat had risen to $2.50 and fox to a top price of $63. In 1914, Stefansson found Herschel 'a busy place. Perhaps twenty-five or more Eskimo whaleboats and a dozen two-masted Mackenzie-built schooners were assembled here to trade with incoming ships' that brought goods via Bering Strait from Canada and the United States. Herschel changed. It was becoming settled and sedate. '. . . the place is getting too damn civilized' Inspector J. W. Phillips complained to Stefansson.

In 1915, the Hudson's Bay Company opened a post on Herschel and made the island its supply depot and transportation center for the Western Arctic. That year Stefansson was again on Herschel. It was a hive of activity. The *Gladiator* had just arrived, owned by the ex-whaler and veteran trader Fritz Wolki. There was the HBC ship *Macpherson*, the Church of England ship *Atkon*, Stefansson's own expedition ship *Alaska* and many others. Herschel was bustling with sailors, traders, police, Eskimos and missionaries.

It was, Nuligak recalled, a good time and a happy, friendly place. 'From Christmas to New Year's the dancing drums never stopped.' There were parties and feasts. 'On Christmas Day we were all invited by the minister to dinner. On New Year's it was the HBC's turn to entertain us with all kinds of good things to eat. The RCMP also gave us a day, in between these two. We had all kinds of games, and we returned home only when we felt like it.'

*This ancient whale boat built in San Francisco is probably the last one in the Western Arctic. It lies on the beach at Tuktoyaktuk.*

*Herschel Island, 4 August 1921. The ship in the harbour is the H B C's 'Lady Kindersley'; police buildings are on the right.*

Henry Larsen spent his first winter on Herschel in 1924 and loved it: 'there was never a dull moment'. That year the Royal Canadian Mounted Police bought some of the old whalers' buildings and made Herschel its subdivision headquarters. In an unofficial way Herschel had become the 'capital' of the Western Arctic.

Fur prices remained high throughout the 1920s. Some trappers earned as much as $10,000 per year, then a fortune. Many bought schooners and when Nuligak visited Herschel in 1926, there was 'a whole fleet of little schooners, with people coming to sell furs and buy provisions. The price of fox was high: forty, fifty dollars a pelt.' Attracted by this wealth, Herschel became 'a Mecca for itinerant dentists' eager to sell dentures and gold teeth.

In 1931, fur prices dropped sharply. By 1932, 'white fox had practically no value'. Even Nuligak, the proud and active hunter 'came close to being obliged to beg.' Herschel's fortunes went into sharp decline.

In 1932, the police moved its subdivision headquarters to Aklavik. In 1938, the Hudson's Bay Company made Tuktoyaktuk its supply depot and transportation center. The same year the police closed its Herschel detachment. When Henry Larsen on the return trip through the Northwest Passage in 1944 stopped at Herschel, the place which he had known as a young man 'as a thriving Arctic metropolis' was 'completely deserted . . . not a soul was to be seen'.

In 1948, the R C M P returned, primarily to breed sled dogs. The waters around Herschel are immensely rich in seals which made it easy to feed the dogs. But the days of sled dogs and dog-team patrols were nearly over. The detachment closed again in 1964. There was a brief flurry of activity in the early 1970s when, in view of the oil discoveries in the Arctic, the idea was considered to build a deep-water marine oil terminal at Herschel. A plethora of scientists from different disciplines descended upon the island. The idea was abandoned, the scientists left and Herschel lapsed again into obscurity.

Herschel is quiet now, a place of memories and slow decay. The great community building where the whaling captains played billiards still stands, in amazingly good condition. So are the large warehouses that once held trade goods and baleen. The old mission, where Mrs Stringer taught shorthand to whalers, is nearly in ruins, but sort of inhabited. Within its roof live about forty black guillemots. It is their only known nesting site in the Western Arctic. Most of the ice cellars have collapsed; two are still in good condition. Of the Eskimo houses nothing remains but a few grass-grown mounds. Picket fences, weathered and sagging, surround the Eskimo graves. A great storm in the 1970s toppled all the massive, wooden boards that mark the whalers' graves, but the inscriptions on most of them, some in leaden letters, are still clearly legible: Henry Cruiz, died 1895, aged 29; John Wilke, died 1894, aged 20; Joseph P. White, died 1894, aged 19; George Kealoha, died 1895, aged 18; George Edson, born February 22, 1897, died February 12, 1898.

Five thousand miles away, in Puget Sound, the last of the steam whalers, the *Mary D. Hume*, now nearly 100 years old, the first ship to winter at Herschel and whose $400,000 cargo started it all, works as a tug boat. ◆

# DOG POWER

**Photos and text by Robert Tinker**

*A five-dog sprint team leaves the starting chute, intent on closing the gap on the teams ahead.*

IN WESTERN CANADA one of the outstanding sporting events is the Canadian National Dog Sled Classics held in Winnipeg in February, sponsored by the Festival du Voyageur and the Voyageur Sled Dog Club.

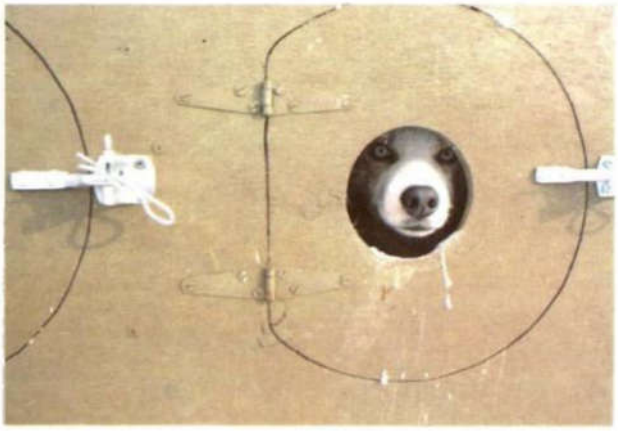
The racers arrive at the site, often from miles away. Friendships from previous races are renewed and 'dog talk' flows freely. The race site is, for the most part, a scene of friendly rivalry. For many, the joy of participation will be the only reward.

As race time approaches sleds are secured and the traces laid out. The dogs lean into their harnesses in anticipation. Chute time approaches and handlers are enlisted to help get the teams to the starting chutes.

The timer's clock counts down the seconds. Teams are lined up for a staggered or a mass start — depending on the type of race. Howling, excited dogs drown out most other sounds. Drivers, as anxious as their teams, talk to their dogs, praising them and urging them to a good start.

Once on the trail the driver and his dogs work alone against the clock. On command, the seasoned lead dogs negotiate the team through 'gee' (right) and 'haw' (left) turns or follow the driver's command to 'go on by' when passing another team or a distraction along the route. In mass-start races such as the freight class, the first team to cross the finish will be the day's winner. The results of staggered-start sprint races will not be known until the times have been posted.

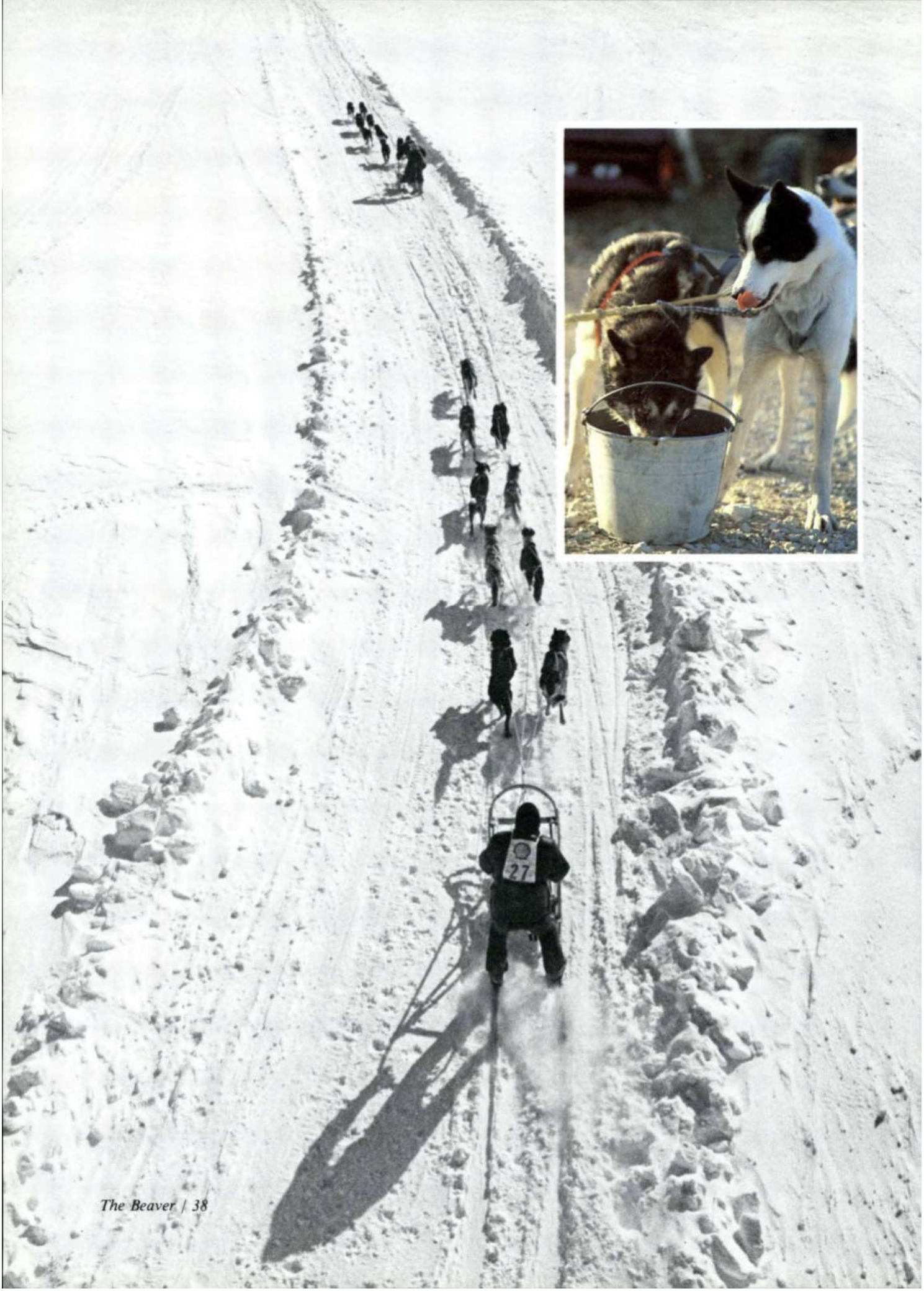
A typical race day includes various types of events. Three, five, seven and nine-dog sprint classes race over trails from three to fifteen or more miles in distance, depending upon the class. Speed is the key and sprint teams have been selected and trained to



*A sled dog arrives at the site and surveys the scene from his box.*

*Jericho, a Malemute, takes to the air before succeeding in a pull of almost 800 pounds.*

*Photographer Robert Tinker of Winnipeg is archivist of the Voyageur Sled Dog Club.*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*In the over 65-pound weight class, Jericho braces to pull his load.*

cover the distances in the shortest possible time.

Freight races test the strength and endurance of teams pulling loaded sleds. The number of dogs per team entered may differ but the sled or toboggan is loaded with the same amount of weight per dog. The dogs used in freighting are heavier, chosen for their ability to pull and for their endurance.

The weight-pull event is a popular competition held at many organized events. There are two categories in weight pulls: one for dogs over 65 pounds and one for dogs less than that weight. The dogs must pull a weighted kamotik over a distance of fifteen feet; the winner is the dog that can pull the greatest weight in one minute. Spectators are always amazed by the spirit and strength of the dogs in this event. Pulls of a thousand pounds are not uncommon in either class.

The key to a good team is the spirit of the dogs and their training. Mushers may spend many hours perfecting their team and their time and effort are often reflected in the results of a race.

Whatever the level of involvement, the mushers have found a great way to enjoy winter. Sled-dog racing is exhilarating exercise for dogs and drivers, and a reliable, efficient and quiet means of transportation for the winter outdoor enthusiast. ◆

*Freight dogs hauling drivers on loaded sleds pull away from a mass start.*

*Nine-dog teams race along a fifteen-mile trail at the 1980 Canadian National Sled Dog Classic in Winnipeg.*

*Inset: A cool bucket of water after the race.*

# The Mission at Ile-à-la-Crosse

By Barbara Benoit

Société Historique de Saint-Boniface

*Ile-à-la-Crosse, 1874. From a drawing on onion-skin by Sara Riel, sister of Louis Riel and a member of the Sisters of Charity, Order of Grey Nuns. Three nuns of the Order first arrived at Ile-à-la-Crosse in 1860; Sara (Sister Marguerite-Marie) joined the mission in 1871 and served in the school and hospital until her death in 1883 at age 34.*

Author and researcher Barbara Benoit is a graduate in English literature of Carleton University, Ottawa. Through assisting her husband, Dr Paul Benoit, with his research on Mgr Laflèche, she became familiar with the history of the early Catholic missionaries in the North West.

Quotations from its archives by permission of the Hudson's Bay Company.

IN SEPTEMBER 1846 two young priests went ashore at the remote Hudson's Bay Company post of Ile-à-la-Crosse, sent to establish a mission. Louis-François Laflèche, who had been two years in Assiniboia, was twenty-eight; his companion, Alexandre-Antonin Taché, had arrived from Canada only the summer before, and was twenty-three.

'They send me children! It is men that we need' Mgr Provencher had cried in despair on first seeing Taché. But he was soon writing to the Bishop of Quebec: 'You need have no fear in sending me Tachés and Laflèches.'

The hearts of the young priests may well have sunk as they gazed at the barren landscape of Ile-à-la-Crosse. They were ill prepared to winter in such a spot, a situation that was a source of wonder to Roderick McKenzie, who for sixteen years had been in charge of the post and the English River District. 'It is rather surprising' he wrote in a private letter to Sir George Simpson, 'that the Old Venerable Bishop would Send two young Priests, to Establish a Mission, that did not understand one word of the Indian Language, without an Interpreter, Fisherman, or any one that would cut a buttel of wood or bring them a Kettle of Water.' But Laflèche and Taché had, in addition to the divine, two sources of human comfort: the Chipewyans, who welcomed them gladly, and Chief Factor McKenzie himself, who found them 'very agreeable young men' and was disposed to give them all the help the post could afford.

The establishment of St Jean-Baptiste de l'Ile-à-la-Crosse marked a turning point in the slow development of the Roman Catholic missions of the North West. The first priests had been sent out in 1818 at the instigation of Lord Selkirk to serve the French-speaking Métis of the Red River. From his station at St Boniface, Mgr Provencher had struggled, with the help of one or two assistants, to reach out to the Indian tribes throughout the prairies. But St Boniface was still, in 1844 when Laflèche arrived, the only station with a permanent resident.

That spring, however, the Red River District had been detached from the Diocese of Quebec and made an independent vicariate. By 1848 it had become the Diocese of St Boniface, one of the largest and least populated dioceses in the world. This change threw the problem of the recruitment of missionaries directly onto the shoulders of Mgr Provencher. He realised that only a religious order could provide him with the manpower and the continuity to serve his vast territory. In 1845, therefore, the year after Laflèche's arrival, he brought out the first two Oblates, Père Aubert and Frère Taché.

Among the Indians of the plains the missionaries had had little success. In 1842 another priest, M. Thibault, had written in disgust to his prelate, 'When the last buffalo is dead, we may then attempt something on the prairies.' The life of the buffalo hunters

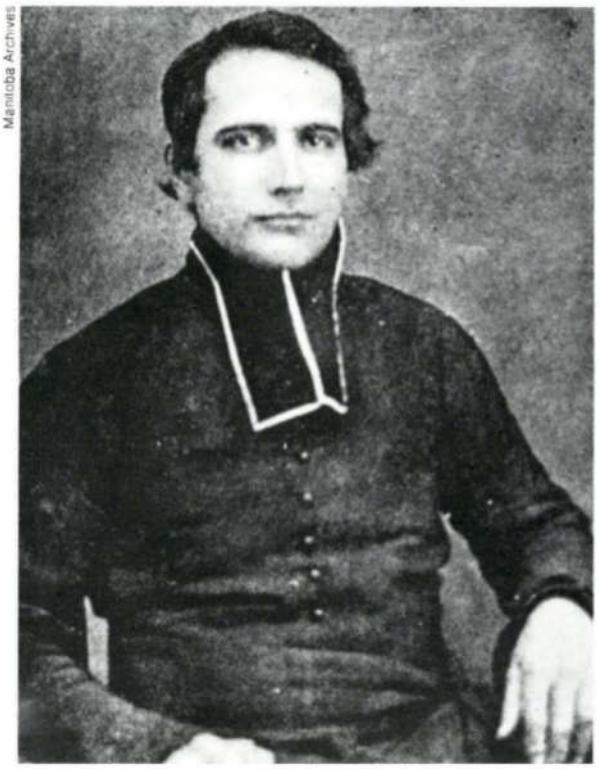
*Mgr J. N. Provencher, first Bishop of St Boniface.*

was rich and easy. They felt no need for the solace of Christianity. M. Thibault asked permission to turn north, to the woods.

The readiness of the Chipewyan Indians to place themselves in the hands of missionaries had already drawn comment. John Henry Lefroy, sent to conduct a magnetic survey in 1843-44, recorded that they would ask even the factor for religious instruction. 'They would sometimes say to him, "You are at leisure now, sit down and tell us of the Master of Life, and how we may become good livers."'

It is not surprising therefore that Roderick McKenzie should have invited Thibault to his post. McKenzie may have thought not only of attracting more Indians, but also of forestalling the Wesleyan missionary from Norway House, James Evans, who had sent an emissary to the English River District promising the Indians, in McKenzie's phrase, 'more butter than bread'. Evans had been a troublesome presence at Norway House, and in 1845, when he shot his interpreter, fell under suspicion of murder.

Thibault arrived at Ile-à-la-Crosse in the spring of 1845, exhausted and starving. His visit was a great success. 'We had a Good Sermon from the Priest today' the fort's journal records on May 25. 'he baptised and married a number of the Chipewyans.' In all, in a two-month stay, Thibault performed nearly 500 baptisms. And so Mgr Provencher made plans to establish a permanent mission. Laflèche and Taché were chosen to go.


Manitoba Archives

*Louis-François Laflèche at the time of his ordination in 1844 when he was 25 years old.*

The policy of the Hudson's Bay Company toward missionaries was complex. Its main interest, naturally, was in the smooth operation of the fur trade; and the introduction of missionaries to remote posts produced effects which could not easily be calculated. They were a burden, certainly, on the transportation system. Often, on the other hand, they were a civilizing influence on the rough society of the forts and supported the Company in its struggle to maintain prohibition. The great question was whether they would discourage the Indians from hunting and turn them to a more agricultural way of life.

Sir George Simpson trod a careful line. He tried in practical ways to help the missionaries, while exerting considerable control over the establishment of new mission posts. Chiefly anxious to isolate the various denominations and avoid ugly rivalry, he discouraged independent action on the part of the factors and traders. Roderick McKenzie was reprimanded for inviting Thibault.

McKenzie heard with misgivings, therefore, of the expected arrival of Laflèche and Taché: 'I beg here to mention that I will not embark the Priests or any thing belonging to them: Unless I have instructions from your Hand to that effect, and particular orders to embark them. I recalled that you was not pleased for my inviting Thibault the Priest to come to Isle ala [Crosse] two years ago, altho' he was of great Service to us in bringing back the Chipewyans from the plains. I am determined not to fall into such errors again.'

But Simpson had decided to countenance the post, and had written to Mgr Provencher: 'I have to inform you that, the priests will be maintained, free of expense, during the voyage in the same way as our own people, partaking, as far as Norway House, of such fare as is provided for our sloops, and messing, from Norway House to Isle à la Crosse with the gent$^{m}$ in charge of the brigade.' He went on to promise that the priests would be lodged in the fort, free of charge, until they could build their own house; that Company servants would be lent to build it, their food and wages being charged to the mission; and that provisions and clothing would be brought in on Company barges 'on reasonable terms'.

Boats were leaving Red River early in July. Laflèche and Taché presented themselves to Simpson on the 8th and were given letters of introduction. That evening they embarked.

There were two sloops. Each carried two passengers and a crew of four or five. Laflèche and Taché shared one. On the other were Mr W. Simpson, Sir George's brother-in-law, and, Taché recalled, a young man from Upper Canada 'qui voyageait comme artiste' —Paul Kane.

The heat was intense; the air windless. The boats' progress downstream was slow. The priests sought relief from the oppression of their cabin by sleeping on deck, on the sails. But the mosquitoes tormented them, and sudden rain drove them back below — where, it turned out, the mosquitoes had taken refuge as well. Kane, who had gone ashore to sleep in an Indian lodge, fared little better: 'one of the most awful thunder storms . . . that I have ever witnessed, set in, and effectually prevented our repose. Such tempests here are of frequent occurrence: so vivid was the lightning, and so near the rattling and crashing of the thunder, that I fancied several times during the night that I heard our vessels dashed to pieces by it. The missionaries on board were much terrified, and spent, I believe, the whole night in prayer.'

Contrary winds and calm held them up at the mouth of the Red River; but on the 14th they were awakened before dawn by the bustle of the crew. They sailed all that day, through the night and the following day, north on Lake Winnipeg, and anchored at midnight at the George Islands. The boat rocked constantly. Taché was seasick. On the 18th, the wind holding, they traversed the last sixty miles, out of sight of land, and shortly before sunset reached the dangerous bay leading toward Playgreen Lake. Twenty miles up Playgreen Lake, on the east, was the small Rivière aux Brochets; and twenty miles up it, Norway House.

Norway House was an active post, and the two missionaries immediately began ministering to its Catholic employees and to the Rainy River Brigade,

twenty-two men, nearly all Catholic, some of whom had not seen a priest for several years. But all of Taché's care was soon needed for Laflèche who was struck down by severe dysentery, one of the three epidemics (the others were measles and influenza) that had been plaguing the country that spring. Laflèche was soon delirious with a high fever. Taché kept round-the-clock watch by his bed, fearing not only for the life of his companion, but for his own miserable state if he were left to continue on alone. Fortunately, within five days Laflèche recovered. Taché wrote with relief to his mother: 'It seems that his goodness increases as we travel, and I thank heaven with all my heart for having given me such a companion.'

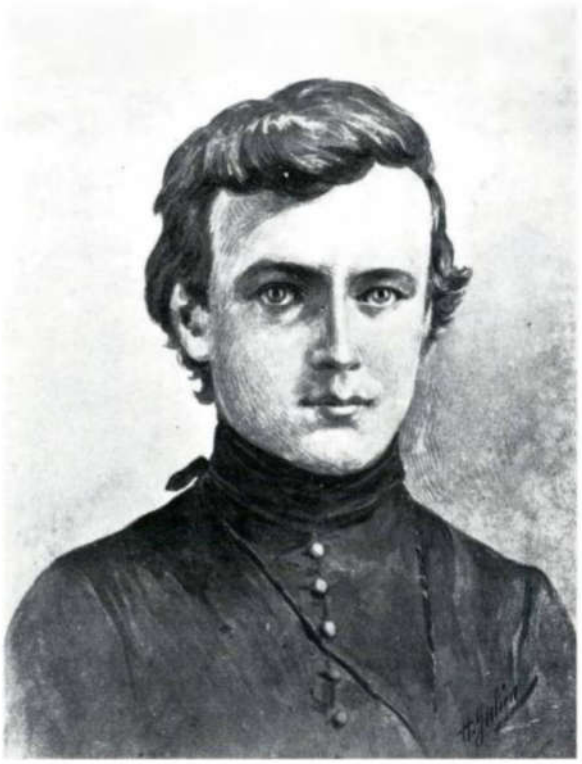
Chief Factor Roderick McKenzie had been waiting at Norway House since 17 June for his son, Samuel, to return from delivering the year's haul of furs to York Factory. Simpson had written telling McKenzie to take the priests back with him to Ile-à-la-Crosse, adding 'you must do your best to make them comfortable & if you keep them in good humour, I think you may find them useful in encouraging the natives to industry.'

Mr McKenzie was 75 years old. Rheumatic pain prevented him from writing his own letters that June, and he walked with the aid of two canes. These disabilities led him to think of retirement. The problem of when he should resign and where he should settle was compounded by the necessity of providing for his large Métis family. He had proffered his resignation to Simpson that spring: 'The residence of 53 years in the Indian Country makes me greatly attached to it, and leave it with regret, but go I must.'

Simpson had answered immediately: 'While you continue healthy & that the business is not irksome or harassing to you, I can see no reason for your retirement — & certainly no one can say that you are a burden on the concern while the business under your charge is so profitable & prosperous as it has been ever since the district fell into your hands.' McKenzie was persuaded to remain, and Simpson wrote a further letter advising him to settle, when he did retire, in the country he knew so well: 'you wd be much more comfortable & happy here than in the civilised world.'

Mr McKenzie had problems with his children too that spring: 'I never expected to hear such disgraceful reports about Roderick . . . that he was a drunkard and squandering the Company's property. . . .I took the liberty of suggesting last year, when I heard he killed a man and was going wrong; that he should be sent to the North, where he would be useful and out of harm's way.'

Several of McKenzie's sons had positions with the Company. Samuel was postmaster for the English River District, and a great help to his father as the latter's infirmities more and more prevented him from travelling. A younger son, Alexander, was working on

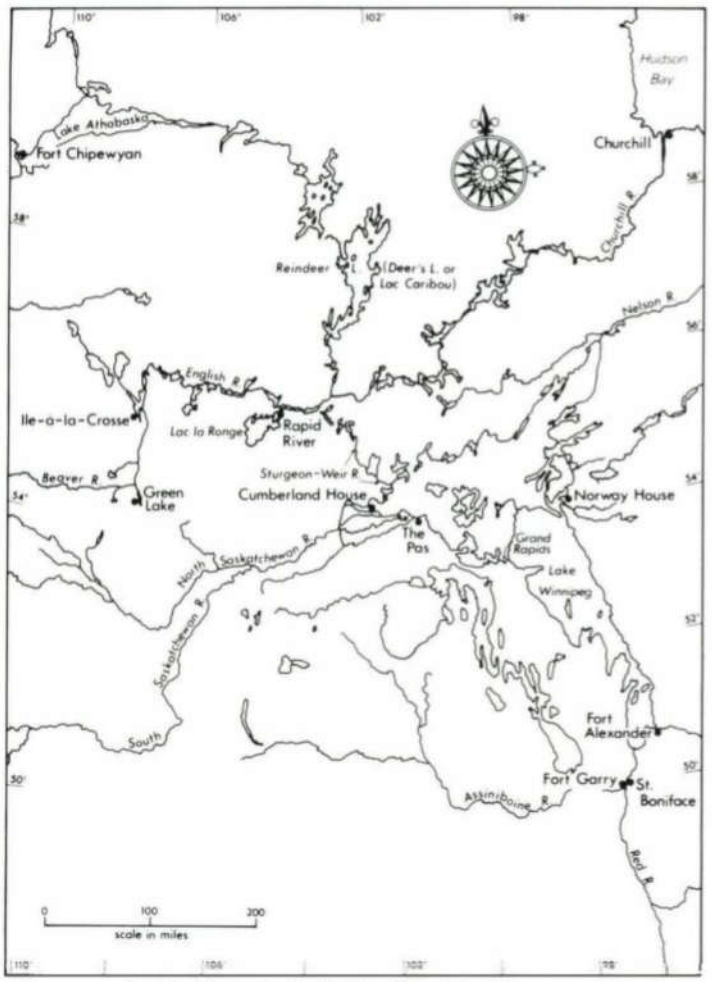


*Alexandre-Antonin Taché, at the time of his appointment as co-adjutor bishop to Mgr Provencher in 1851 when he was 28.*

Mr Campbell's Mackenzie River Brigade: 'I am thankful to the Company for admitting him into their Service. The poor fellow was beginning to be Sick with the Measles when he went off, and if he gets wet will Die, on the way. It is as well. It would be far more satisfactory to hear of their Deaths while they are young than to hear of their disgraceful conduct when they are grown up Men.'

Despite these preoccupations McKenzie welcomed the priests warmly, and, as both he and Samuel spoke French easily, took immediate pleasure in their company. 'They appear to be easy good Natured fellows' he wrote from Norway House on 20 July, 'and will not interfere with the Company's affairs. . . . The only thing to be feared, that they will be calling the Indians for Religious instructions, at the proper time for hunting Furs.'

The McKenzies and the priests left Norway House on 27 July in two York boats, each rowed by six or seven men. These barges were much more comfortable than canoes and carried several times the load, but were awkward and heavy at portages. They rowed back to Lake Winnipeg and across the north end to Grand Rapids, the most difficult portage of the trip. It took two days. They lined the barges up with half-loads two-thirds of the way, then dragged them overland the last two miles before returning for the baggage, five tons in each boat. Indians encamped




*Ile-à-la-Crosse, in the English River District of the Hudson's Bay Company, c. 1846.*

near the rapids were hired to help with this disheartening job.

By 10 August they had reached The Pas. Laflèche had spent some time here the previous summer, and a small group of the faithful beseeched him with tears to remain. He could only promise that another priest would come as soon as possible.

While Laflèche and Taché travelled, they set to work learning Chipewyan from the oarsmen. It was vital that they master the language of their prospective converts. Laflèche, for six years a teacher of grammar and rhetoric, was a talented linguist. He began with enthusiasm to make notes for a grammar which was later of great help to his successors. The priests already knew Cree, the other language of the region, slightly, but Chipewyan was entirely strange. Worse, it was for them altogether unpronounceable. Laflèche expressed a fear of uprooting the uvula, so involved were the contortions of his tongue.

The Chipewyan oarsmen were happy to teach and quick to learn. Two, indeed, in eight days with M. Thibault the previous summer, had learned all the prayers for saying the rosary — and that in French.

At Cumberland Lake on 13 August the boats took on fresh provisions at the fort while Laflèche tended an invalid and baptised several children. The following day they turned north, crossed Lac des Anglais and entered the Rivière Maligne (Sturgeon-Weir). It took three painful days to row up this river, although a canoe could come down in a few hours. Some of the priests' oarsmen were sick: the others had to work doubly hard in the icy wind. The night was freezing.

By morning a young Chipewyan had fallen ill. When they reached Portage de la Pente on the 18th he was very weak. Taché helped him to walk over the portage. His pulse was rapid; and although his hands were freezing he was drenched in sweat. He asked for his bundle, put on new clothes, and appeared to feel a little better. Taché left him and returned to watch the men dragging the barges up the rapids. The first man ashore found the Chipewyan lying unconscious and cried out. Running to him, Taché and Laflèche found a slight pulse and administered conditional baptism. In a few moments he was dead. He had been ill at York, and had confided to the priests that their presence on this trip relieved him of the fear of dying unbaptised.

The young oarsman buried, the party continued on to Fort de Traite, where Charles Thomas, the English Métis interpreter in charge of Lac Caribou, had a summer habitation. McKenzie delivered his supplies and urged him to give the missionaries every assistance. Meanwhile, Laflèche baptised eight Indians whom he found well enough instructed, and performed one marriage.

At La Ronge again they discharged cargo. Now the end of the journey was near. The country was barren and rocky, devastated by forest fires. The priests were isolated as neither had been before. It gave them courage to see with what resignation Mr McKenzie on his crutches withstood the fatigues of the journey.

On Wednesday, 9 September, they reached the lake. There, struggling at dusk in wind, rain and snow, they lost the other barge and camped for the first time alone. The following afternoon, when the wind died, they crossed to the fort and stood at last on the bleak site of what was to become one of the most successful of the North West missions.

Both the North West and the Hudson's Bay Companies had long ago established posts at Ile-à-la-Crosse. The remaining fort, at the south end of the lake, consisted of several houses and sheds encircled by a palisade. Other posts in the area, of lesser importance, were at Lac Vert (Green Lake) and Lac Caribou (Reindeer or Deer's Lake); there was also a Cree settlement at the site of the former post at Lac la Ronge. The terrain was one of sandy hillocks interspersed with swamps, a land where, as Taché wrote: 'the order given on the third day of creation has

Royal Canadian Air Force

*Ile-à-la-Crosse c. 1924, with the Hudson's Bay Company post in the foreground and beyond, the Roman Catholic mission. Today the settlement of Ile-à-la-Crosse has a population of about 800.*

not yet been perfectly carried out.' White spruce was the only wood suitable for construction. Around the edges of the lake was some fertile land, where barley and potatoes could be grown.

Winter was already closing in. There could be no thought of starting construction for many months. The priests were lodged at the post. Mr McKenzie made them as comfortable as he could.

There were roughly two thousand Indians in the region, and September was the month in which they gathered around the posts before the great winter hunt. 'We found them as well-disposed as they could be' wrote M. Laflèche, 'and already reasonably well-instructed by M. Thibault.'

There was still time before the snow to choose a site for the mission, and the priests had been told that land a day's walk away was more fertile. Taché packed his pen-knife in his pocket and set off to see. He wrote later to his mother (by a postal service that delivered mail twice a year): 'The Indians, informed that I would be there, gathered to see me and to have some children baptised. My host had been hunting a few days earlier, and had saved me the best three quarters of a moose. He feted me in his lodge. Finding myself embarrassed by not having a fork, I would have supplied the want with a pointed stick, but my host's wife thought she ought to offer me an awl. This I accepted, but thought as I ate "If Mother could see me!" I wanted to burst out laughing, and had the greatest difficulty in comporting myself with suitable seriousness.'

The site had advantages, but they decided, for the convenience of the Indians, to build the mission only a mile from the fort, on the spot where the North West Company had first established itself.

When the Indians left for the hunt, the priests procured a language teacher, a blind Métis who spoke both Cree and Chipewyan, but, unfortunately, not a word of French. Their studies limped along.

McKenzie's pleasure in his guests and their conversation did not abate. The priests sat willingly with him long after meals, and he soon took to visiting them in their room. When these visits became so frequent as to interfere with their work, they were obliged to adopt a stratagem to spare him the pain of

being repulsed. Warned of impending arrival by the noise of his crutches, they would cast themselves upon their knees. Seeing them through the half-open door, McKenzie, a man who, although not given to prayer himself, respected those who were, would withdraw as quietly as possible.

The old factor was impressed not only by the priests' character, but by their practical knowledge. He came one day upon M. Laflèche measuring the height of a tree with a graphometer. Astonished that one could measure something from a distance, he waited until Laflèche had gone, then sent an employee up the tree with a cord. The measurements agreed within an inch. 'These priests know everything' he concluded calmly.

Winter was grim that year in the English River District. '. . . Misery and disappointments stare us in the Face,' McKenzie wrote in an open letter to the chief factors and traders. 'Early in October the Measles and Influenza broke out violently among our unfortunate Indians, and carried off Many valuable Fur Hunters, with a great number of Women and Children. I think on a Moderate calculation (when we hear of the whole) that one third of the whole Population in this District are in their Graves.'

In the spring, the priests prepared to quit the fort. It was decided that Taché would make a series of tours to lakes in the region while Laflèche, less robust, set about the building of the mission station.

McKenzie wrote to Samuel at La Ronge and to Charles Thomas at Lac Caribou urging them to provide escort for Taché. For Laflèche he built a log cabin, 36'x24', saying tactfully: 'I shan't enter the cost of this cabin on the company books: it is such a sorry thing I would be afraid of being reproached.'

The cabin was exactly what was needed. Laflèche turned carpenter to finish it himself. At one end, in the centre, he built an alcove for the altar; on either side, a priest's cell just big enough to hold a cot. The remainder was kitchen, refectory and parlour; and at prayer time, when the alcove doors were opened, choir and nave.

When the ground thawed, he cleared and dug a garden and planted potatoes. Potatoes and fish were to be their staple diet. What they lacked that fall, the fort, as its journal records, provided: 'The servants took 112 Kegs Potatoes. We give 50 to the Priest.' In later years, the priests shared in their turn with the fort. 'The Priests' Hunter brought them the Meat of a Moose of which they sent us the half' reads the entry of 16 July 1849. 'Our Hunters did not give us a pound of Meat as yet.'

Gardening and carpentry were only necessary sidelines. Most of Laflèche's day was spent in language study and in struggling to teach the catechism to his converts. The Chipewyans had embraced Christianity to a man, and were insistent in their demands for instruction. The Crees were more reluctant.

Taché, meanwhile, had gone to Lac Vert, 100 miles away, with the four rather substandard dogs he had bought cheap, and had returned full of enthusiasm for the art of dog-sledding. Four days later he had left for La Ronge with Samuel McKenzie. It was an exhausting trip. Having weak dogs, he was unable to enjoy the luxury of an occasional ride on his sled. He marvelled at his companions, who slept well buried in the snow on bough beds with a single blanket, while he shivered wakefully in his hole under two blankets and an ox-hide.

At La Ronge a Protestant missionary was at work. Taché pushed straight on, therefore, with the men sent by Thomas and reached Lac Caribou at the end of March. By the winter route he was only 300 miles from Ile-à-la-Crosse; by canoe, nearly 500. The fort was poor, but Thomas had had built for his use a table and chair (amenities the post had hitherto lacked) and had assigned him the better of the two rooms.

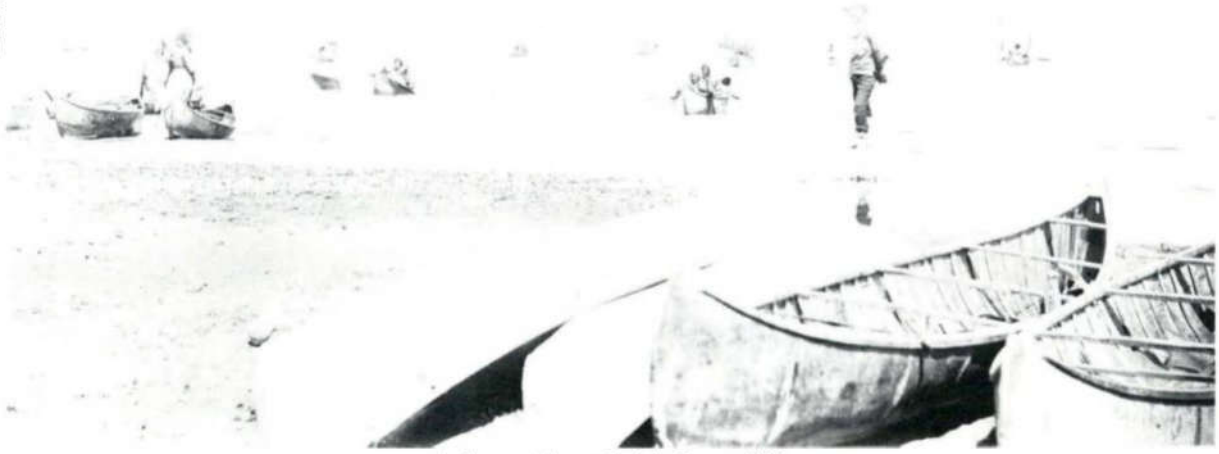
Taché's stammering efforts in rudimentary Cree and Chipewyan sufficed for individual conversation, but not for addressing a public assembly. An interpreter was essential. Thomas was eager to oblige and spoke both French and Cree. A Protestant, he could not be expected to convey the full measure of Taché's faith and conviction, but the arrangement was adequate. It was less easy for Taché to guess what he appeared to be saying in Chipewyan, for three translators were then involved, one a Chipewyan hostile to the new religion.

But he was on the whole well received. A distant relative of Taché, Georges Deschambault, had previously been in charge of Lac Caribou, and the enthusiasm of the Indians for the new faith was reinforced by their affection for this former officer.

On 26 May Taché set off with Thomas on the return trip. He was back at Ile-à-la-Crosse by 15 July, and impressed by the cabin and the potatoes. Better yet, an unfailing supply of fish swam in the lake only two canoe lengths from the door, and a cow and some hunting dogs had been promised them. Taché stayed five weeks, helping Laflèche and working on his languages.

As the priests became settled, the mission was beginning to affect the life of the settlement. McKenzie, despite his generous help, was still prey to misgivings as to what that effect would be. In July he wrote to Simpson from Norway House, where he had been laid up en route to York Factory by lameness in his fractured leg: 'The Priests writes me . . . of our best Chipwyans . . . having gone off to the Barren Lands and will not return for some years, for fear of the Measles and other diseases. But I think they are more afraid of the Priest than they are of the Measles. The Chipwyans cannot put up with the idea of being deprived of a plurality of Women, and the Priest very properly will not allow them to keep more than one. This at once shows the loss and mischief that will arise,

E. Brown Collection, Provincial Archives of Alberta



*Indians arriving at Ile-à-la-Crosse, 1896.*

by having resident Missionaries among the natives.'

But by winter, as he observed the priests at work, McKenzie was reassured: 'The Priests are now lodged in their own House within a Mile of this Establishment. They gave us no trouble so far, and advise the Indians to be industrious and pay their Debts.'

His stay at the cabin over, Taché, with two Indians and a young Métis to serve mass, left on 20 August for Lake Athabaska, 400 miles north. He reached Fort Chipewyan on 5 September. Here he was the guest of Francis Ermatinger, Chief Trader, a man on whom the solitude sat heavily if one can judge from a plaintive letter to Simpson about the temperance restrictions: 'When it [wine] was first kept out of the department, It may have been necessary to do so, but . . . I think, even the board of management will become security, that I will not give mine to the Indians. . . . I never was at a place were [sic] an occasional glass of wine was more necessary.'

About 1,000 Chipewyans lived on the shores of Lake Athabaska. Taché's days were long and onerous. Sharing his host's table, he felt obliged nonetheless to remain in conversation for a few minutes after meals. The Indians in their eagerness to learn grudged him even this. One day, not five minutes after he had finished eating, as the servant cleared the table, an Indian travelling with him strode in and addressed him severely: 'What are you doing wasting time talking to this petty official when a roomful of Chipewyans are waiting? You had better come and teach them.' Taché translated this reprimand to his host and quickly excused himself. In a month he baptised 194 people, all of whom could say the rosary in French and several prayers in their own language.

This extraordinary success in winning converts Taché attributed partly to the essential similarity of the Chipewyans' indigenous religion. They believed already in a giant in the sky who saw and heard everything and who punished vice and rewarded virtue, but they had few rites for worshipping him. They believed in a multitude of evil spirits at war with the Great Spirit and sometimes gaining an advantage over him. These they identified with disease, death, and predatory animals. Their legends included the fall of man through woman, the great flood (from which four men and some birds and animals were saved on a floating island), a race of giants, and the dispersion of the various peoples. They held murder and theft in abhorrence, and if they found some lost object in the forest would go to the nearest fort to see if anyone there owned it. They had little taste for revenge. The priests' only major task was to persuade them to use their women more kindly and to contract monogamous marriages.

Taché returned to Ile-à-la-Crosse in mid-October, four days before the freeze-up. As the cabin had not yet been caulked, the priests began to feel the cold. For two weeks they worked steadily mixing mud and hay and filling the gaps in the walls. Then with a rag they plastered the interior with a mixture of earth and ash.

The cabin sealed, the deficiencies in the chimney

became apparent. 'After two weeks of suffering' wrote Taché, 'we were on the point of being metamorphosed into hams: that decided us to build a new chimney.' Their chimney problem was persistent. The post's journal for Wednesday, 17 October 1849 reads: 'The men variously employed, two are assisting the Priest in the building of his Chimney, which was burnt on Saturday evening. they commenced repairing it on Monday, but were very unsuccessful as it fell twice.'

Practical problems did not deter the priests from fulfilling their social obligations. They regularly invited McKenzie and his family to dinner. 'It suffices to add' the irrepressible Taché confided to his mother, 'that I was, on these occasions, the head chef of our kitchen: you can imagine the result.'

Taché was strong and fit that winter after his travels. Rejoicing equally in canoe and snowshoes, he was to gain the reputation of a swift and untiring traveller. But Laflèche was in constant pain. He had suffered for years from rheumatism in an arm and a leg. This, whether from hard labour or the swampy country, grew into lumps which then turned into open sores. He now limped constantly. He made light, however, of his bad health. It troubled him only in that it kept him from sharing equally in spreading the mission. 'To punish me for my laziness' he wrote in 1855, 'the good Lord sent me rheumatism, which tormented me for a long time: and to prevent me from forgetting the lesson, He took care, when He removed it, to leave me lame.' The winter of 1847-48 was a very hard one for him. He was seldom able to stray far from the hearth, and now faced the prospect of having to give up his calling as a missionary. The winter post brought the news of the death of his mother.

Taché felt deeply for Laflèche. He went ice-fishing regularly for their daily food, and dressed Laflèche's sores morning and night. He said mass every Sunday to spare the invalid the strain of a fast. Laflèche served as cantor, though not to the exclusion of his other duties: 'As mass was being sung, the cooking was being done in the same room: that is to say, a pot full of fish was hanging in the fireplace, there being as yet no stove. After the post-communion the celebrant turned to say, *Dominus vobiscum*, and saw his cantor in his surplice holding a pot in his hand with a rag, and stirring the contents to keep them from burning, even while he responded to the officiant. Those present saw nothing funny or surprising in the manoeuvre. M. Laflèche combined, almost without thinking, the rather different functions of cantor and cook: as for Father Taché, he could scarcely keep a straight face.'

All winter the studies went on, and the grammars and dictionaries took shape. When the priests' thoughts left their work, they turned to Sir John Richardson's expedition in search of Franklin which was encamped at Cumberland House. Although certain there was no hope of finding Franklin alive, the priests looked forward to meeting the explorers when they moved north the following summer.

On 8 March 1848, Ash Wednesday, Taché left on his spring round. He travelled with Thomas and Samuel McKenzie, once again on showshoes behind his elderly dog team. At La Ronge, conditions were unspeakable. The winter's snowfall had been unprecedented. Its weight had sunk the ice, which then flooded, forming two feet of thick slush. The dogs could not pull the sleds. The men, doing the work of the dogs, frequently sank over their knees in ice-cold water. For a month afterwards Taché suffered pain in his legs.

The Chipewyans had returned to Lac Caribou in large numbers bringing people of a neighbouring tribe, the Caribou Eaters. Again, Thomas gave Taché every support. A Protestant by birth and unwilling to be converted because he believed that Paul had preached the one doctrine in England while Peter the other at Rome, he nonetheless came to mass every Sunday and at his own wish became sole cantor. To satisfy Thomas's taste for music, Taché, least musical of men, gave him daily lessons in plainsong.

When he returned to Ile-à-la-Crosse in June, Taché was relieved to find Laflèche somewhat better — despite having made a 150-mile trip in a very cold period to visit some sick Indians. McKenzie too was at the post that summer. He was having more and more trouble with his legs, and Simpson had authorized him to remain inland, forwarding his craft to York Factory under the charge of Samuel, 'who, from his experience and steady habits, I have no doubt will be enabled to transact your business at the Depôt.'

On 24 June, the long-awaited Richardson finally arrived. Richardson had first visited Ile-à-la-Crosse as surgeon and naturalist to the Franklin expedition in 1820. In his journal he recorded his impressions of the new mission: 'A strong gale blowing this morning detained us at the post, and the day being Sunday our voyageurs went to mass at the Roman Catholic chapel. . . . This mission was established in 1846 under charge of Monsieur La Flêche, who has been very successful in gaining the confidence of the Indians, and gathering a considerable number into a village round the church. In the course of the day I received a visit from Monsieur La Flêche and his colleague Monsieur Tasché. They are both intelligent & well-informed men, and devoted to the task of instructing the Indians. . . . They spoke thankfully of the assistance and countenance they received from the gentlemen of the Hudson's Bay Company.' Richardson, himself very interested in languages, enjoyed discussing Laflèche's work on the grammatical structure of Chipewyan.

That summer the priests built another cabin, 20 feet square, to house the Indians who worked at the mission. They had twelve pecks of potatoes planted. The cow was expecting. Taché, planning from the calf to the milk and the milk to the butter, wrote to his

mother for a 'very detailed' recipe for making cheese. They began to think of building a chapel.

Late in the summer another priest, Père Faraud, O.M.I., arrived to share the work. On 28 August Taché set out again, glad not to leave Laflèche alone for the coming winter.

He reached Lake Athabaska on 20 September in a Company boat with Mr Ermatinger. 'It is a very grateful relief to the labours of the missionary' he later wrote, 'this friendly welcome which is everywhere extended to him.' And elsewhere: 'The members of the honourable Hudson's Bay Company have not only rendered us service, but even, in many cases, have shown themselves sincere and devoted friends.' Ermatinger, for his part, confided to Taché that he was usually 'bored to death', and the priest's visits made the time pass much more quickly.

Taché had thought to leave Athabaska with the first snow, but Mr Ermatinger pressed him warmly to remain. And although the Indians had dispersed, he did stay: for, as he wrote to his mother, he found the men who worked in the forts often as ill-instructed and as much in need of a priest as the Indians.

Christmas he celebrated in its original humble spirit, with only a six-inch wooden cross to decorate his bedroom chapel. On 27 December a Métis arrived from his home a ten days' trek away, bringing his wife to be baptised. Grateful, he presented Taché with three healthy sled-dogs.

Taché left with the winter post party on the day after New Year's in the midst of a sudden blizzard. He now had six dogs and two sleds, and being able to ride from time to time, withstood the long trip and the extreme cold better than ever before.

The post that came that January set in motion a number of changes. Both the two priests and the old factor were now soon to leave Ile-à-la-Crosse. Laflèche received a letter from Mgr Provencher summoning him back to Red River directly. Another letter, to the two Oblates, Taché and Faraud, threatened the very existence of the mission. The recent revolution in France had reduced the Order's funds, and the priests were instructed to abandon outlying stations for the present and to restrict themselves to Ile-à-la-Crosse.

It was unthinkable to Taché that he abandon those who trusted him to return. He and Faraud composed a letter begging not to be recalled and offering to live entirely off the land if only bread and wine for communion could be sent them. They began the new regime by dismissing all their servants.

This indifference of the priests to money was a continual source of wonder to Roderick McKenzie. 'Catherine' he once exclaimed to his daughter, 'what's going to become of us who do nothing for our salvation, if these men, as they tell us, aren't sure for themselves? '

Hudson's Bay Company Collection

*Francis Ermatinger, a chief trader for the HBC, in charge of the Athabaska District at Fort Chipewyan, 1847-50.*

Laflèche left in June, 1849, regretted especially by the friend with whom he had worked so closely for three years in founding the little mission.

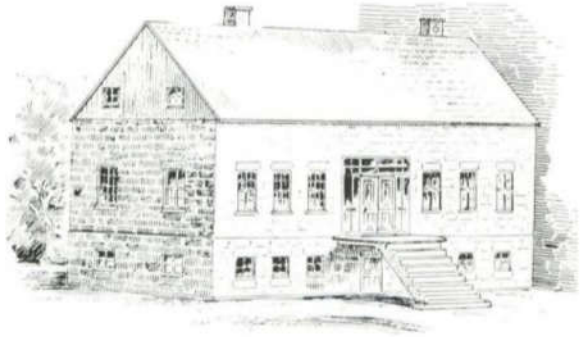
Mr McKenzie too had at last resolved to retire. Considering one place after another, he had tentatively decided to buy land on the Ottawa River, not far from his troublesome son, Roderick. Dissuaded from moving to Canada, he had at last received permission to settle in some Company-owned buildings at Fort Alexander with the nine members of his family still in his charge. The winter of 1849-50 he spent readying the post for his successor: 'One of our Men Killed one of his Dogs today (Louis Lavarin) a very good Dog. I would advise my Successor not to give him Dogs belonging to the Company, as he treats the poor animals most cruelly.' In 1852 Georges Deschambault, Taché's relative from Boucherville, took charge of the post at Ile-à-la-Crosse. His piety further strengthened the little mission.

McKenzie left with his family in June, 1850. 'This year more than ever before' Taché wrote to his mother, 'I have been the object of care and delicate attention from them which certainly I could not reasonably have expected.' A bout of illness just before he left deprived the old man of the use of one leg, so that even with crutches he was unable to walk. Taché, on an unsuccessful attempt to revisit Lac Caribou, accompanied the McKenzie family on the first stage of their journey on the summer express.

There were still many problems at the mission, not

Minnesota Historical Society

*St Boniface Cathedral, destroyed by fire in December 1860. From 'Harper's New Monthly Magazine' February 1861.*



*The bishop's residence at St Boniface, 1845.*

the least being the famine which had begun the year before and which prevented the Indians from gathering in large numbers. But more priests had arrived. And a blacksmith, long-requested, was assigned to the post, and built for the mission in September a more reliable chimney.

Although he did not know it, in the same month that McKenzie left, Taché's own departure was fixed. On 24 June the Pope had named him co-adjutor bishop to Mgr Provencher. Provencher had first fixed on Laflèche as his successor, but Laflèche, unwilling to accept the responsibility on account of his all-too-evident bad health, finally persuaded him that Taché, despite his extreme youth, was the man for the job.

The news reached Ile-à-la-Crosse in January 1851. 'The new bishop-elect' Taché wrote of himself in delight, 'had unfortunately enough vanity to be flattered by the choice that had been made of him.'

The three men from Ile-à-la-Crosse were thus to be neighbours once again. Discontented at Fort Alexander, McKenzie moved to the Red River and settled finally about twenty miles from St Boniface.

Laflèche's competence had attracted the attention not only of his Bishop, but of Governor Simpson. In 1850 he was made a member of the Council of Assiniboia. Simpson wrote, 'I feel satisfied you will be a valuable addition, knowing how much you have at heart the best interests of the people and the prosperity of the colony.'

Taché, of course, went to Rome for his consecration, and on his return divided his time between St Boniface and his much-loved Ile-à-la-Crosse.

Roderick McKenzie lived to be 87, and the two priests continued to call on him. Taché's affection for his old friend shines through his account of one of these visits: 'We had the misfortune to find him in bed, in the grip of a cruel gout which allowed him not the slightest movement. When he saw us, this loveable old man seemed to forget his illness and remember only our friendship. He laughed and joked with us as he did in the old days when he offered us such generous hospitality.' ◆

# Galiano Island Pioneer

**Extracts from the diary kept by Charles Groth from 1881-1887.**

Edited by Marie Elliott

*Mrs Elliott is a descendant of the pioneer families of Mayne Island.*
*She is completing graduate studies for an M.A. in history at the University of British Columbia.*

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IN THE SPRING of 1881 Charles Groth, using his newly acquired English, carefully wrote the first entries in his diary:

Journal Commenced:
May 12, 1881. Went to Cowichan and pre-empted my claim. Paid school tax $3.00. Pre-emption fee paid $2.00. Alien Declaration fee paid .50. Bought at Ordano's Store, Cowichan, one pail .25, eggs, candy, crackers $1.25.

May 13. Came home from Cowichan. Split wood.

The enterpising, 26-year-old Danish immigrant from Rensburg, Schleswig-Holstein, had travelled two days (a fifty-mile return trip by boat) in order to register his claim. One can readily sense the pride underlying his first terse sentences; he now had land of his own! For the next six years Charles faithfully recorded his homesteading efforts in a large, oblong notebook. He rarely missed a day.

The Groth journal is a record of establishing a homestead on Galiano Island, one of the beautiful Gulf Islands of British Columbia, situated midway between Vancouver and Victoria in the Strait of Georgia. Pioneering here was arduous, as it was on the inland prairies. An additional problem was the fact that the water was the main highway, often made treacherous by strong tides and winds. Then, as today, residents had to own or borrow a boat if they wished to communicate with a neighbour, shop for groceries, pick up mail, find employment, or visit friends. Trips to New Westminster and Victoria would be cancelled, not by bad roads, but by storms and rough water or the loss of a pair of oars.

Adequate steamer service to the Gulf Islands did not commence until wharves were built in the mid-1880s. Prior to that time the genial captains would 'hove to' in order to discharge passengers and freight. Until amalgamation with the Pioneer Line in 1883 to form the Canadian Pacific Navigation Company, the steamship division of the Hudson's Bay Company operated two passenger vessels between Victoria and New Westminster: the S. S. *Princess Louise* and S. S. *Enterprise*. Commencing in November, 1880, these side-wheelers made mail stops three times a week at Miner's Bay, Plumper Pass (now Active Pass) and Mayne Island where they were met by the local post-master, W. Tom Collinson, who distributed the mail for the outer Gulf Islands. Charles Groth and many of the early settlers preferred to travel to Victoria or New Westminster in their own boats. However, they relied heavily on HBC ships for mail service and occasionally, for shipping produce.

Like many adventurous newcomers to British Columbia, Charles Groth arrived in Victoria by sailing ship. On 16 June 1875 he declared before a public magistrate that he intended to become a British subject, and shortly thereafter he must have heard that land was available for pre-emption in the Gulf Islands. He learned the rudiments of farming by working for Noah Buckley on North Pender Island before moving to Galiano.

Following the example of a number of early settlers on the islands, Charles began his homesteading career by raising sheep. In this venture he had a partner, Johnny O'Brien, who owned adjoining property on Galiano. On 2 June 1881, Charles recorded the sale of sheep wool:

Packed and sold our wool at 13¢ a pound. 205 pounds $26.65. Gave Johnny 8 dollars for his share. My part $18.65.

Since the average fleece weighs about 5 pounds, he must have owned at least 28 sheep. The following year Charles sold 201 pounds of wool which meant an increase to his flock of about 12 sheep.

Like most aspects of homesteading, sheep raising was not without its difficulties. Usually, the sheep were allowed to run free over the large acreage held between Charles Groth, Johnny O'Brien and several other neighbours. Each animal would be marked with coal tar to indicate ownership, then rounded up and separated at shearing time. Charles records that he frequently had to rescue the more adventurous sheep from rock cliffs, and from the marauding dogs and

Public Archives of British Columbia

*Steaming out of Miner's Bay, Active Pass, is the Hudson's Bay Company's side-wheeler 'Princess Louise'. She carried passengers, freight and mail for the early settlers of the Gulf Islands.*

'panthers' (cougars) that plagued the flocks.

On occasion the sheep were stolen. One notorious fellow would bring his sloop into shore under cover of darkness. His clever dog would then silently gather a flock together and herd them onto the boat. By daybreak the woolly cargo would be safely over the American side of the border.

In his first year of sheep raising, Charles had difficulty in obtaining a good ram. In order to make inquiries he rowed 12 miles to North Saanich and stopped overnight at Pender with Noah Buckley. A few days later, he made the same trip again and purchased a ram for $10. But within two weeks we find a gloomy entry: 'My new ram found dead Monday morning. Killed or died on Sunday.' Not able to afford the cost of a replacement, Charles then had to search among his friends and neighbours for a ram which could be borrowed.

For undisclosed reasons Charles became disenchanted with sheep ranching in the fall of 1883 and decided to sell his flock. It took four days to collect the animals from the hills and drive them into a stockade. On the fifth day his sheep were separated from those of his partners and put onto a sloop. It took two more days for the sloop to reach New Westminster. Charles did not record how many sheep he sold but he received the substantial sum of $225. With this money he bought lumber and a cow which he picked up at Ladner's Landing on his return down the Fraser River.

Thereafter Charles kept very few sheep, but his reputation as a good shearer must have been well known. Every spring he was called upon to assist with the rapidly increasing flocks of his neighbours on Galiano and Mayne. Using only simple hand shears he could dispose of more than 40 sheep a day. In May 1884 he wrote that he had sheared 251 sheep, and on one busy day he sheared 56. In payment for driving and shearing 181 sheep for a neighbour he received only $19.50.

Once shearing time was over and the ranch in order, a number of the early settlers spent the summer months fishing on the Fraser River. For the first few years Charles found this a worthwhile venture. In 1882 he reported that he and his partners caught 6,901 fish and sold them for 4¢ each. But the 1886 season was disappointing. Charles glumly noted:

From June 22 to September 26 over on Fraser River fishing. Did not make salt and don't intend to try again.

The other months of the year were filled with the many tasks involved in establishing a self-sustaining farm. For the first year after his marriage to Elizabeth, daughter of Henry (Scotty) Georgeson, Charles lived on his father-in-law's property. He was then able to build a house on his pre-emption of 160 acres. His diary records the big event:

Neglected writing on account of moving out here and not having a house or anything else. From September til December 18th building house, verandah, a shed back of the house, and a chicken house, and cleaning away brush, hauling out everything, and etc.

The family were in their new home for Christmas, 1882. Charles intended to go to Nanaimo the next

day, but his entry for 26 December reads: 'Did not go to Nanaimo. No oars for the skiff.'

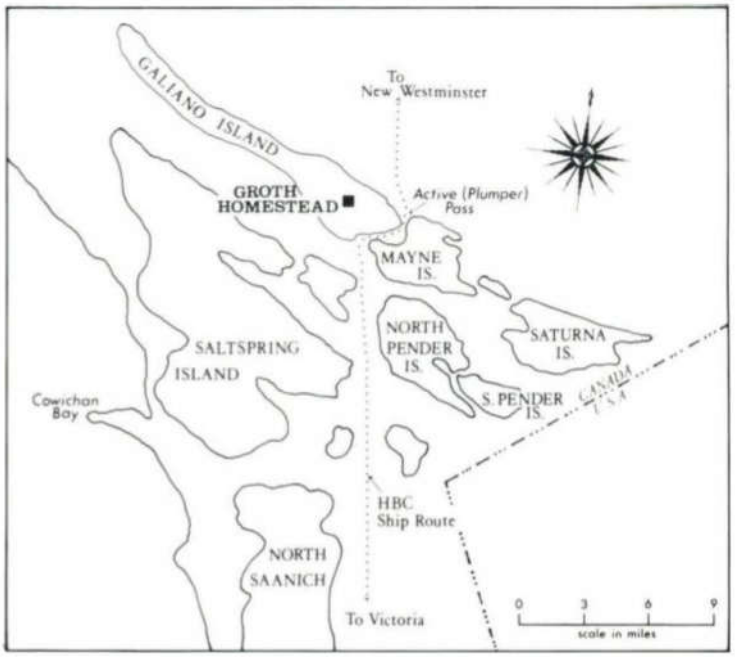
Until it was time for spring ploughing, Charles built steps for the verandah and a picket fence around the hen yard, and split cedar rails. Ploughing and digging began in mid-March. Currant cuttings, potatoes, peas (for cattle fodder), fruit trees, gooseberry bushes and rhubarb roots were set out. To protect the new garden from deer and farm animals more cedar-rail fences were needed, and Charles went at this task with a vengeance. One day he split 110 rails, on another, 120. By the end of April 1882, carrots, onions and parsnips had been planted, as well as more potatoes. Cabbage plants were set out in mid-May, strawberries in June. In the fall Charles was able to build a barn and bring his cow out to the ranch. He also erected a pig sty. Each year thereafter the ranch throve and grew in size. More cattle were added and a substantial orchard was developed with a wide variety of fruit trees. An entry for 1 December 1884 lists the varieties planted that day: Red Strachan, Early Harvest, Bartlett Pear, Gravenstein, Swaar, Northern Spy and Twenty Ounce. Most of his fruit trees were brought from Victoria or New Westminster, but one order was given to a nursery salesman from Walla Walla, Washington, which is a considerable distance from Galiano. When time permitted Charles also did some interior woodwork: a bed for his boys, a chesterfield, and even a pair of clogs for himself.

Necessities were acquired both by bartering and by cash. Charles carefully recorded every transaction; entries for January and February 1884, illustrate his precise bookkeeping:

January 10 Gave Johnny 1 dollar for hay rope and 1½ dollars for oats.
13 Sent ½ dollar for postage stamps.
19 Got a little steer off Jake for 10 dollars. So far Jake and I are square.
20 Got a steer off Johnny. Gave my ram and 2 ewes for him.

February 1 Sent $5 for a pair of mall rings, 1 box of caps, 1 lb. of powder, 25¢ clothespins, 50¢ shot, 1 garden rake.
10 Sent by Johnny $5 for 8 trees, ½ lb. of turnip, ½ carrot, 25¢ onion, 25¢ cabbage seed.
20 Billy fetched me the mall rings and seeds as ordered, did not get the trees. Brought back $2.75 for trees.
29 Got 100 lbs. of potatoes off Jakob Heck.

The produce from the farm was supplemented by plentiful wild game and fish. Charles kept track of the number of deer killed in 1882: twenty-four. (He




*Charles and Elizabeth Groth with five of their six children. From the left: Charles junior, Frederick, Katharien, William and John Henry.*

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*The Groth orchard as it appears today, with yellow broom among the first trees planted in the spring of 1885.*

Marie Elliott

*Charles Groth, in his later years. From a photograph provided by his grandson, C. Groth.*

tanned the skins and sold them in Victoria or New Westminster.) Herring and salmon, abundant in local waters, were frequently dried and smoked for later use. Dogfish were also caught and their livers were sold for oil.

To augment the family's small income Charles managed to bid successfully for one of the first road contracts on Galiano in July 1885. He also worked on government projects at Mayne Island: the lighthouse in 1884, and the wharf in 1885.

Combining social visits with chores, Charles would row over to Mayne several times a week for mail and groceries at Tom Collinson's residence, bartering with a fellow countryman, Jakob Heck, or passing the time of day with his father-in-law, Henry (Scotty) Georgeson, who became the first lighthouse keeper in June 1885. The family also made overnight visits by row-boat to friends on Pender and Saturna who in turn would receive the same hospitality from the Groth family. Although there is record of the occasional disagreement, for the most part Charles got along extremely well with all his friends, neighbours and relatives. He seems to have been especially close to his father-in-law, whom he addressed as 'Vater'.

Intertwined with entries about the homestead are the important notes about the family. The entire first page of the diary was used to record family dates: the wedding of Charles and 16-year-old Elizabeth Georgeson at Cowichan, 20 February 1880, and the names, birthdates and baptism dates of their six children: Frederick, John Henry, William, Katharien Margaretta, Jessie, and Charles.

Although obviously a proud father, the birth of each child is noted briefly. One entry reads simply:

Elizabeth sick in the morning. A little boy born between 8 and 9 o'clock in the forenoon. Mother and child doing well.

No mention was made of the birth of John Henry except that on 23 May 'Betty left for Fraser River.' Then 14 June 1882, 'Boarded the steamer. Bessie came home.' Transferring a mother and baby to a row-boat from a free-standing side-wheeler was a difficult and dangerous feat. A mother and child from Mayne Island were to drown 15 years later under similar circumstances.

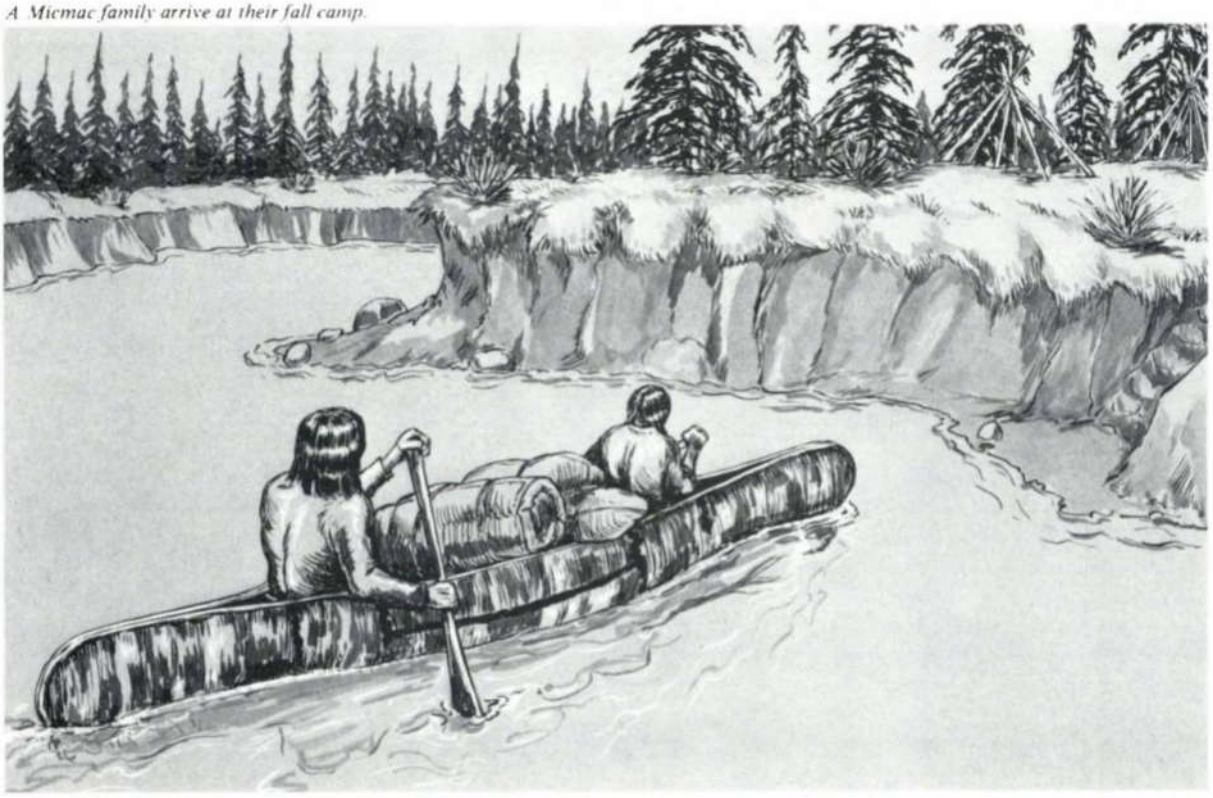
Between 1880 and 1890 the islands were attracting a large number of settlers. Charles's diary is an accurate record of the progress which ensued. He dutifully rowed across Active Pass for the school meetings which resulted in the first schoolhouse for the community on Mayne Island in 1883. And he noted that the long-awaited opening of the first wharf of Mayne, 4 December 1885, was witnessed by most of the residents of Mayne and Galiano. As a proud new Canadian he attended political meetings and made certain to vote in any local elections.

The final page of the diary contains three important sets of instructions basic to any homesteader:

1. Receipt (sic) for tanning deer skins
   two ounces sulphuric acid
   two quarts of water
   half a pound of salt
   warm the water, mix in the salt, then the acid. Put in the skin while warm. Let it remain 12 to 20 minutes.
2. Wheat in drills 8 inches by 12.
3. Hop Beer
   Mix 14 pounds of molasses and eleven gallons of water well together and boil them for two hours with six ounces of hops. When quite cool, add a cupful of yeast and stir in well. Let it ferment for 16 hours in a tub covered with a sack, then put it in a nine gallon cask and keep it filled up. Bung it down in two days.

Between the first and last pages of Charles Groth's diary is a rich, detailed account of a young man's attempt to 'make good' in British Columbia one hundred years ago. Although his homestead has all but disappeared today, his careful notations are a permanent record of the triumphs and failures of a newcomer in a new land. On 9 August 1888, it was duly entered in the Cowichan District pre-emption ledger that Charles Groth paid the $160 pre-emption fee which gave him full title to his property. Like so many pioneers before and after him, he had laboured long and hard to earn the right to call a part of British Columbia his own. ◆

*A Micmac family arrive at their fall camp.*



# INDIAN LIFE IN AUTUMN

**Text by Edward S. Rogers.** **Illustrations by Lee R. Updike.**

AS SUMMER CHANGED TO FALL, the Indians began to prepare for the long winter months. These would be times beset with hardship and to survive them the people diligently secured and preserved as much food as possible.

For the Micmac, fall meant that storms would begin to lash the coastal camps where they had spent the summer. It was time to pack up their few belongings, load them into their birch-bark canoes and paddle and portage their way inland. They travelled in small groups of closely related families and spent the fall together, locating on the banks of a stream. Their conical lodges, covered with sheets of birch-bark, were easily transportable. The Micmac, as did all other Canadian Indians, worked hard at this time of year to ensure that, having survived the present annual cycle, they might also survive the next.

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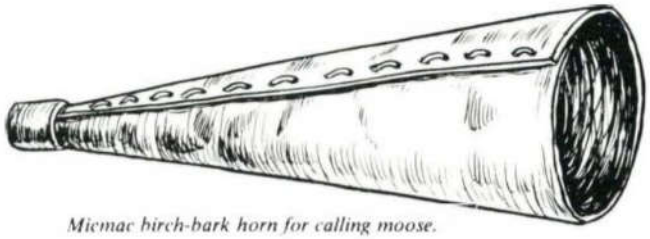
*Dr Rogers is Curator, Department of Ethnology, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.*

*The work of Lee Updike has been published in a number of books, the most recent being 'The First People'.*

The Micmac selected locations for their fall camps that were usually productive of country game. Especially important were eel which in the fall were descending the streams on their way out into the Atlantic Ocean to spawn. As many as possible were caught and preserved by smoking. To give them a desired flavour, they were hung on rock-maple sticks when being smoked.

Fall was an important time to search again for moose. As this was the rutting season the animals were easily attracted to the hunters by imitating the call of the cow with cupped hands or a horn of birch-bark. Another trick to lure the bull within range was to pour water from a birch-bark bowl into the stream as the hunters moved slowly along in their canoes. The bull, believing the sound had been made by a cow, approached the hunters. Calm, dark nights were the best times to pursue this type of moose hunting.

Whenever possible, the Micmac took beaver. The hunters erected deadfalls in the animals' paths, or broke down their dams and clubbed the beaver when they became exposed as the water fell. Deer and bear were taken in snares. To capture spruce grouse, the hunter used a pole snare: a long light pole with a noose attached to the end. He manoeuvered the



*Micmac birch-bark horn for calling moose.*

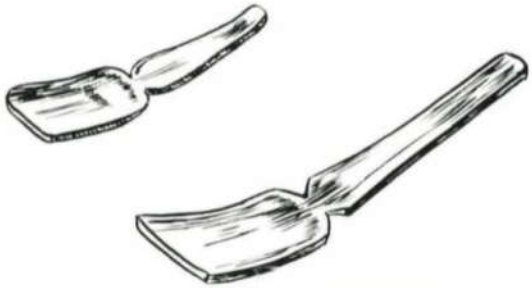
noose over the heads of birds perched high in a tree. Although this species of grouse was relatively fearless of man, it still took skill to capture one.

For the coming winter season, the Micmac killed as much game as possible, dried the meat and used the hides for thongs to lace snowshoes, to secure toboggan parts together and to make warm clothing. Old equipment was repaired and new items were made; little time was available for such tasks during the winter, since even an abundant fall did not negate the continuing search for food throughout the winter.

The Northern Ojibwa, like the Micmac, spent the fall preparing for the coming winter that, for them, could easily end in disaster. The land they inhabited was not as rich in natural resources as that of the Micmac. As summer faded, the Northern Ojibwa left the trading posts where they had spent several summer weeks in obtaining trade goods. Those who had already returned to their gathering centres, packed up and left for their fall camps. In small groups of two to four families each, the various parties canoed to the fall sites that were scattered throughout a vast territory.

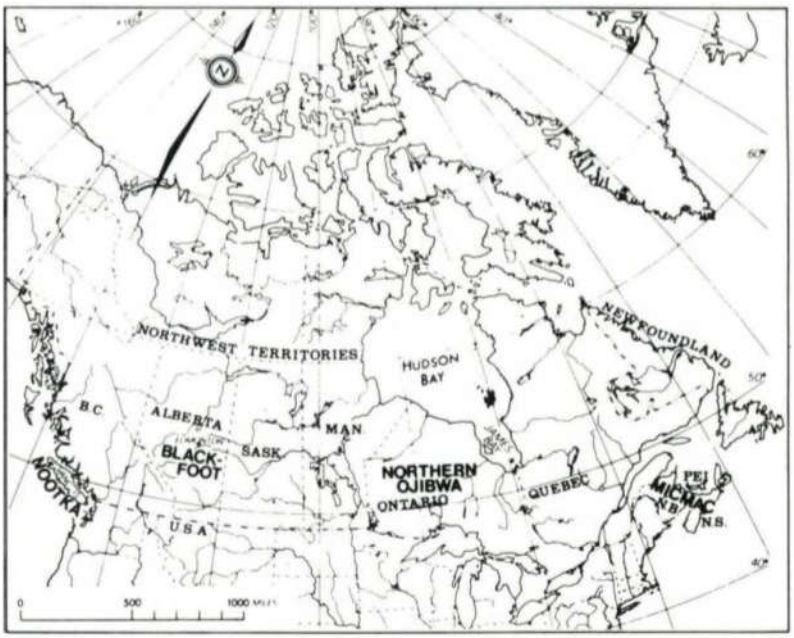
The coming months were an unknown quantity filled with uncertainty, and so it was wise to be in communion with the spirit world. One way of doing this was to secure a beaver, singe the carcass to remove the fur and then cook the animal whole. When the animal was prepared, a feast was given for those beings that ruled over the game animals. To honour the spirits of game animals their remains were treated with respect. If any bear was killed, the bones were hung up and never allowed to touch the ground and the nose was elevated on a pole. Rapport with the spirit world greatly enhanced the hunters' ability to provide adequately for their families and themselves.

Although it was incumbent upon the Northern Ojibwa to be in harmony with the spirits, they could not relax from actively seeking country game. All



*Wooden ladles used by Northern Ojibwa.*

*Bark container, Northern Ojibwa.*



*The Northern Ojibwa whitefish trap.*

surplus meat, fish and berries (hopefully there would be some) were dried and stored, to be drawn upon during the winter months.

The hunting group located its fall camp convenient to a stream known for its abundant whitefish, an extremely important resource at this time of year. Here, in an appropriate rapid, a trap would be set for the fish that migrated downstream at night. The trap was built of poles set in the stream bed at right angles to the flow; these formed a fence from one bank to the other. At one point an opening was left in the fence and here, at right angles, a trough of more poles rose out of the water on the downstream side. As the fish descended the stream, numbers would be washed into the trough and left high and dry in the downstream half of the trough. When the runs were heavy, the men, women and children worked diligently all night long securing the fish and dressing them to be dried the next day. Thousands might be taken this way in a matter of a week to ten days.

The fish were hung on drying racks above a smouldering fire. Once dried, the majority of the whitefish were pulverized and stored in special birch-bark boxes. Coarse fish, such as suckers, were generally impaled whole, ten fish to a stick, and suspended from a high platform. Fish prepared in this fashion were destined for trap bait and dog food. When all other sources of food failed such fish were a welcome addition to the pot.

Sometimes, bears were attracted to the fish trap and could be shot or caught in a tossing pole snare. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, moose began to re-enter the land of the Northern Ojibwa and became important once again in their diet. Also taken were grouse, and waterfowl, as they migrated southward through the area.

Often at the fall camp, the Ojibwa erected conical lodges of poles covered with a layer of moss and duff up to a foot in thickness. An opening was left at the apex of the cone so that the smoke could escape from a fire located directly beneath. At ground level, the entrance was covered with hide or canvas. Such a lodge was often large enough to house several families. As soon as the temperature dipped below freezing, the moss froze sufficiently to make a weather-proof cover that kept the occupants warm and comfortable.

On the western plains, the Blackfoot tribes who had assembled for the summer season, dispersed for the fall bison hunt. The bison cows would be at their prime, and the Blackfoot took full advantage of this fact, making fall the most important season for hunting this animal.

The band, now on its own, was the basic political unit among the Blackfoot. It varied in size, ranging from 75 to 300 individuals. Each was headed by a chief, although if the band was very large there might be additional chiefs. To become a chief, an aspiring

*Blackfoot woman using a bullboat.*

young man had to be able to attract a following. If he had the support of a large number of followers, his group might break from the parent band and pursue its own course of action.

The families that made up each band were not all of equal standing. There were those who might be considered wealthy by Blackfoot standards and it was they who led and were expected to provide for the less fortunate members. If they did not, their poorer followers were likely to join another band where the chief was noted for his greater generosity.

During the fall, the Blackfoot bands were on the move in search of bison. As long as the animals remained numerous near the camp, the people could stay; but if the animals became scattered or moved away, the camp followed. In some years these moves were frequent. The Blackfoot usually did not travel during rainy weather and when a move was made, only ten to fifteen miles would be covered in any one day in consideration of the very old and the very young.

The meat taken from the bison was dried and pounded and mixed with pulverized dried chokecherries. This mixture, known as pemmican, was stored in rawhide parfleches. Each family prepared as much pemmican as it could transport, provided hunting was favourable. Later when the first frosts had occurred, buffalo berries were gathered and dried for winter use, although some would be eaten fresh.

From the horns of the slain bison, the men and women prepared spoons, cups and other utensils. The gluey content of the horn was removed by placing the horn in a fire, and while it was still warm, the excess material was cut away. The horn was then softened in boiling water and moulded to the desired shape. To finish the artifact, the surface was polished and greased with animal fat.

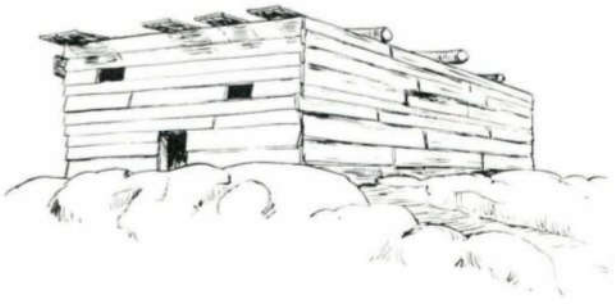
As soon as possible after the hunters brought the animals down, the hides had to be at least partially processed or they would become useless. The women dressed some of the hides to barter with the traders, for buffalo-hide carriage robes were in great demand during the last century. It took a woman at least two days to process a hide. To ease the labour a hide would be cut in half and each section prepared separately. Afterwards, the two halves would be sewn back together with sinew thread. A woman could prepare no more than twenty-five to thirty bison robes during the fall and first part of winter. Later in the year, it would be too cold to continue the work, which had to be performed outside the lodge.

Some of the hides from bison cows were scraped, dehaired and made into lodge coverings. As a rule these had to be replaced every two years. A family head in need of a new lodge cover would request an experienced older woman to prepare one. With her extensive knowledge, she could supervise several assistants and ensure the proper cutting and sewing of the hides. Six to twenty hides were needed for each lodge covering, the number being dependent upon the size of the lodge. This varied with the wealth of the owner and the size of the family. When the task was completed the owner gave a feast for the elderly woman and her assistants.

Another fall task undertaken by the women was to go into the foothills and cut and drag into camp lodgepole pines for new tipi poles. The women then prepared a berry soup and invited all the young men who wished to assist in peeling the poles to come and eat.

With the completion of such tasks, the Blackfoot

*Nootka plank house.*



*The Nootka moving back to winter locations. House planks across two canoes support their belongings.*

like the others were prepared to face the onslaught of another winter.

With the end of summer the Nootka, aware of the approaching storms on the coast, made preparations to move back into the inlets and safer camp sites. In early September they would pack and travel by water. Canoes were paired and the space between them was spanned with dismantled house planks. Once lashed in place, these platforms were ready for loading with all the people's possessions, including quantities of dried salmon and berries. When all was in readiness, the people climbed aboard, cast the craft's moorings free and the young men began the strenuous paddle to the winter home. Mothers carried their infants in cradle boards slung horizontally across their backs. After several stops they eventually settled again for the winter at their usual village site.

Most important to the Nootka at this time of year was the dog salmon, the last species to make its appearance and ascend the streams to spawn. Sometimes special camps were established at appropriate sites where salmon could be caught and prepared for winter use. Generally, they were taken in basket traps set underwater on the bottom of the stream. Traps were made by many pine splints lashed together to form a cone twenty feet long and four to five feet in diameter at the larger end. At the other end was a small wicker door through which the fish were removed. As the fish ascended to the spawning grounds, a number were diverted into the body of the trap. Often several hundred might be caught in a matter of fifteen minutes. Salmon were also taken by trolling with hook and line.

The women dressed the salmon by cutting off the heads and tails, splitting them, taking out the backbone, and hanging them up to dry inside the plank houses. They were then stored in large baskets and boxes.

In addition to drying salmon, halibut, and cod, the Nootka women gathered hazel nuts and salal-berries in the mountains. On these special trips they were accompanied by armed men for protection. The salal-berries were mashed and moulded into flat cakes that were dried, stored, and eaten with oil during the winter. At times, waterfowl, migrating southward along the coast, were taken.

As fall drew to a close, the salmon departed from the area for another year. They had left the Nootka with sufficient food during the winter ahead to give the people time to undertake their social and ceremonial customs. The arrival of winter marked the end of another annual round of activities: economic, social and religious tasks that usually ensured the continued existence of the people as year followed year. ◆

***This feature concludes the series on Indian life through the four seasons.***

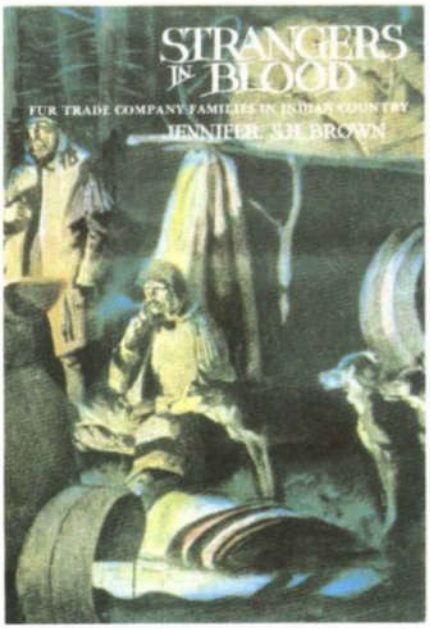
**STRANGERS IN BLOOD:**
**Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country**

By Jennifer S. H. Brown. University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 1980. 255 pp., illus. $24.00.

*Reviewed by John E. Foster*

*Strangers in Blood* is an anthropological study of the behaviour of fur-trade officers as fathers and as husbands in relations with their Indian and mixed-blood families. Brown finds noteworthy differences in the behaviour of the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company men. The amalgamation of the two companies in 1821 tended to moderate but did not eliminate this difference. Brown provides convincing evidence that, on balance, officers associated with the pre-1821 Hudson's Bay Company took increasingly purposeful steps to act as fathers and husbands in their family lives in Rupert's Land. Officers associated with the North West Company tended not to express such behaviour to the same degree.

Brown sees three sequential factors explaining this distinction. While not disregarding the possibility of cultural differences between the Highland Scots of the North West Company and the English and Orcadians of the Hudson's Bay Company, the weight of the author's analysis emphasizes the distinctive settlement patterns of the two companies. The HBC forts on Hudson Bay were distant outposts whose inhabitants had few if any social connections with the directors in London. The directors, in turn, while being men of consequence, were of minor importance in the enormity of London society. In contrast the forts of the North West Company were important links in an imperial chain anchored to a colonial society at Montreal in which North West Company officers and their kin were amongst the social and commercial elite.




The different settlement patterns of the two companies contributed much to different business and recruitment practices. In the Hudson's Bay Company the officer was an employee, recruited as an apprentice; he, at best, would have only the most distant social connections with any of the London directors. In contrast the North West Company officer was a wintering partner who frequently owed his recruitment and possibly his promotion to his position in the network of kin dominating Montreal society. The isolation of the Hudson's Bay Company officer over the period of a lengthy career emphasized the importance of local circumstances. The 'patron-client' relationship between older and younger officers, frequently expressed in part through 'country marriage' between the young officer and a mixed-blood daughter of the older officer, was a central institution in this society. On the other hand North West Company officers tended to behave as if their absence from Montreal society was but a temporary inconvenience. Their country marriages and resulting families were of minimal interest and of short duration. They were stop-gap measures previous to returning to Montreal and undertaking legally binding marriages. Brown takes much care to trace the historical development of the two traditions and to identify the exceptions to her general findings. Her assiduity in this regard lends further credence to her conclusions.

The administration of Governor George Simpson in the years after 1821 threatened to accentuate the racial criteria of social classification inherent in the North West Company tradition. However, numerous 'gentlemen' in the fur trade with native-born wives and offspring worked actively to defend their familial interests. To Brown their principal defence was 'patrifocality', the family characterized by the father and husband acting in a manner which made him central to its internal relationships. Frequently such fathers successfully placed their children in British and Canadian society. Those children who remained frequently became members of the social elite in the fur-trade community of the old North West. In emphasizing her conclusion Brown contrasts the patrifocality of some native families and their orientation to the civilized world, and the Métis, who emphasized matrilineal descent in espousing a national consciousness. The distinction 'was surely, at least in part, a consequence of those traders' [Nor'-Westers] frequent tendency not to assume an active paternal role.'

For historians the process whereby individual decisions and actions aggregate into social patterns should constitute a focus in scholarship. For many the emphasis seems to be placed on a somewhat static view of behaviour as the expression of culture rather than cultural change. To appreciate this latter dimension Brown suggests the use of 'macrobiography' as a most effective means of collecting, organizing and comparing materials on groups of individuals. Through macrobiography the 'structuring of social life over extended periods' should become evident. Brown's success with

this method, along with techniques emerging in scholarly works by A. J. Ray, Douglas Sprague and Trudy Nicks, suggests the possibility that macrobiography could be applied to data concerned with those groups, particularly native communities, who remain peripheral to Brown's study. Perhaps the origins of the Métis owe as much to 'active paternal roles' expressed in actions appropriate to the hinterland as opposed to the metropolis and its colonial offshoots. Perhaps the macrobiographical method, applied to missionary, parish, census and half-breed scrip records, as well as Hudson's Bay Company documents, will furnish insight into processes of institutionalization that marked the lives of the many as well as the few in Rupert's Land.

An important dimension of Brown's study is the direction indicated for future scholarship. This dimension underlines the significance of her findings, culminating in her concept of patrifocality and of her effective use of macrobiography. Hopefully *Strangers in Blood* will engender the debate worthy of its importance.

*Dr Foster is assistant professor of history at the University of British Columbia.*

**SASKATCHEWAN**
**A Pictorial History**

Edited by D. H. Bocking for the Saskatchewan Archives Board. Western Producer Prairie Books, Saskatoon, 1979. 209 pp., illus. $18.95.

*Reviewed by J. William Brennan*

*Saskatchewan: A Pictorial History* offers fascinating glimpses of a province which has, in the brief time it has been a part of Canada, undergone dramatic and fundamental changes. A highly mechanized agricultural economy has supplanted an earlier one based on the fur trade and the buffalo hunt. Diverse peoples representing different racial, cultural and religious groups, have come to make their homes in Saskatchewan. The development of the province has been affected too, Doug Bocking notes by way of introduction, by participation in two World Wars and by a shattering drought and depression.

To illustrate these changes, Bocking has relied heavily on photographs; but drawings, cartoons, posters, pamphlets and newspapers also find a place in the book. Excerpts from diaries, letters, reminiscences and other sources complement the illustrations. The result is a volume which portrays both the major events that shaped the history of Saskatchewan and the more commonplace activities which filled the lives of its residents.

This book is the first of what will eventually be a two-volume history published under the auspices of the Saskatchewan Archives Board to mark the province's 1980 Diamond Jubilee; but its focus, happily, is not limited to the last seventy-five years. The first chapter attempts to illustrate the life of the nomadic Indian and the awkward period of adjustment which followed the disappearance of the buffalo.

The second and third chapters depict the rush of settlers and the back-breaking toil needed to transform prairie and parkland into family farms; subsequent chapters deal in turn with the 'Great War' of 1914-1918, the Twenties, the Depression years and the Second World War. The more recent decades are left to some future 'visual history' to chronicle, though the last illustration in the book — a self-propelled combine — symbolizes one of the profound changes which has occurred in Saskatchewan since 1945.

*Saskatchewan: A Pictorial History* ought to find a place on the bookshelves of present and former residents of the province, and indeed of all who have an interest in the history of these western plains. The Saskatchewan Archives Board should be commended for undertaking such an ambitious project, and Doug Bocking, for his fine editorial work.

*J. William Brennan is assistant professor of history, University of Regina.*

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**OLD TRAILS AND NEW DIRECTIONS**
**Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference**

Edited by Carol M. Judd and Arthur J. Ray. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1980. 337 pp. $30.00.

*Reviewed by Russell W. Fridley*

This volume is the published distillation of the papers, except for two, presented at the highly successful Third North American Fur Trade Conference, held in Winnipeg in May 1978. Far more than its predecessors in St Paul (1965) and Winnipeg (1970), the 1978 gathering took on an interdisciplinary complexion, featuring scholars not only of history, archaeology and anthropology but also of economics, geography, ethnohistory and demography. The conference carried the study of the fur trade along new paths — as the title of the book suggests — with the increasing prominence of women as scholars and subject matter, and the infusion of younger scholars, especially in the fields of economics and history.

In extent, the published papers roughly divide between traditional approaches and new directions. It is this counterpoint of radically different approaches that Glyndwr Williams, in his summing-up 'Epilogue' found the 'most enduring memory' of the event. Traditional interpretations are well represented by Richard Ruggles's 'Hudson's Bay Company Mapping', Hilary Russell's 'Angus Bethune', James Gibson's 'The Russian Fur Trade' and Stephen Johnson's 'Wrangel and Simpson'. On the other hand, new analyses are offered by the papers of Jennifer Brown, Carol Judd, John Nicks and Sylvia Van Kirk. Unfurling the banner of social history over the fur trade, they question long-held assumptions of well-established scholars of an earlier generation. Their studies shift the focus from the efforts of European explorers and fur companies to the background of the men who joined the trade and the impact that traders and native populations had on each other's culture. Nicks presents a case study of a single Orkney parish, relying heavily on historical demography; Judd surveys various ethnic groups employed by the Hudson's Bay Company after 1821; and Brown and Van Kirk focus on the domestic relationships fur traders developed

in their new environment. Native societies — Indian and Eskimo — assume a more prominent role in this study. Toby Morantz in her paper 'The Fur Trade and the Cree of James Bay' pens a well-founded caution for all who employ comparative history as a methodology: 'A final lesson in this: when you compare developments among the James Bay Cree coasters and inlanders, the northern caribou hunters, the northern Ojibwa, and the parkland Indians of the prairies, the inescapable conclusion is that there was not one fur trade, but many.'

This reviewer's favourite of all the papers is Irene M. Spry's 'Innis, the Fur Trade, and Modern Economic Problems'. Her essay not only pays tribute to the most influential scholar of the North American fur trade but provides a refreshing overview of a subject which has fallen victim to a common malady — overspecialization. She demonstrates Innis's tremendous contributions not only to historical study but to the field of political economy. Innis's insights, drawn from the Canadian fur trade, form a microcosm from which to draw trends and patterns about the contemporary international political and economic scene. 'The study of the Canadian economy' says Innis 'becomes of crucial significance to an understanding of cyclical and secular disturbances not only within Canada but without. In a sense, the economics of frontier countries are storm centres to the modern international economy.' Enduring analogues abound: for example, the Hudson's Bay Company is the prototype of the multinational corporations of our day. Underdeveloped and developed countries alike will do well to study the North American fur trade — the pattern of discovery, rapid exploitation and exhaustion of a succession of staple resources that have marked Canada's economic fortunes. The sober lesson of this cycle is clear for any country whose economy is dependent upon a single, dominant, staple export.

For any serious student of the fur trade, this book is a rich lode of the field's most recent explorations, and it lays a solid foundation for the upcoming Fourth North American Fur Trade Conference to be held at Thunder Bay, Ontario, and Grand Portage, Minnesota, in October 1981.

*Russell W. Fridley is Director of the Minnesota Historical Society.*


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**THE NAVY, THE COMPANY, AND RICHARD KING**

By Hugh N. Wallace. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1980. 232 pp., illus. $21.95.

*Reviewed by Alex Stevenson*

In this book of British exploration in the Canadian Arctic 1829-1860, Professor Hugh N. Wallace presents a fresh perspective.

The introduction discusses the dominant geological features of the Canadian Shield and the strata of the High Arctic as obstructions to exploration. Related to this and throughout the narrative, the author draws on a wide range of scientific, technical, social, psychological and medical data and skilfully evaluates the activities of the various expeditions. At the time in question, these were mainly organized by the Hudson's Bay Company and, on a more expansive scale, by the largely unemployed Royal Navy, victorious from the Napoleonic Wars with well-equipped ships and experienced seamen. Then there were the whalers who, after 1818, extended hunting to the north and east coasts of Baffin Island. Some participated in the Franklin search, stimulated by the rewards offered by the tenacious Lady Franklin.

Wallace views exploration in terms of a metropolitan country, Great Britain, discovering a hinterland region, Canada's Arctic. He is concerned with the problems of initial and follow-up discovery: the choice of entry routes, the techniques of travel along them, and the varying degrees of success that resulted from these ventures. A great deal of emphasis is placed upon the personalities and the incentives of those who led the parties and those who supported or sent them out.

Wallace threads his account around the provocative figure of Dr Richard King, a surgeon-naturalist who had been with Captain George Back in 1833-35 looking for the missing Ross expedition. Back's party went overland and by boat to the mouth of the Great Fish (Back) River which runs into the Arctic. From this experience, King became an avid exponent of light, indigenous and inland or coastal means of arctic travel as opposed to large-scale, heavily-equipped expeditions — such as Franklin's last voyage.

Even before Franklin sailed, King was in correspondence with him and in a rather offensive manner told him naval expeditions were so much nonsense. He continued during the search years to be critical of everything. His persistent haranguing alienated him from all those of influence, including the Royal Geographical Society, the Admiralty and the Navy. He even fought with the Hudson's Bay Company whose method of exploration was the small party accompanied, where possible, by the native people who had an intimate knowledge of the country.

Had King's views been adopted, Professor Wallace contends, the Boothia Peninsula might have been fully delineated, the Northwest Passage discovered by the early 1840s, and the Franklin tragedy prevented. Later, King's unheeded cries accurately predicted where the missing seamen might be found. However, this single shocking tragedy occasioned a multiplicity of search expeditions, the discovery of one-half of the Canadian Arctic

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and three Northwest Passages.

Professor Wallace is a member of the faculty of the department of history at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax. In the preface he states: 'The roots of this book lie in the influence of my father, J. N. Wallace (1870-1941), a Dominion Land Surveyor in Canada's Northwest in the early part of this century.'

The book is illustrated by pictures and appropriate maps and includes a bibliography and notes on sources.

*Mr Stevenson, now retired, was chairman, NWT Historical Advisory Board and federal administrator of the Arctic.*

**THE HOT ARCTIC**

By John Dyson. Little, Brown, Toronto, 1979. 290 pp., illus. $19.95.

*Reviewed by Jim Lotz*

John Dyson, a New Zealander who lives near London, spent seven months moving around the Canadian Arctic, Greenland, and Alaska, gathering material for this book. He flew on a surveillance trip with 405 Squadron of the Canadian Armed Forces; visited the Frobisher Bay high-rise and read the graffiti there; travelled with the Bay's Ed Spracklin on a store tour of the Central Arctic; dropped in on exploration camps, drill-ships, and Prudhoe Bay; talked with the taciturn, bored residents of a DEW Line station; attended a square dance.

The result is a book with a cutting edge that strips away many illusions about the Inuit and the Arctic. In vivid prose, illustrated with his own colour and black and white photographs, Dyson presents a view of the Arctic and conveys the feel of life there today. He describes Alaska as 'the rawest edge of the American feeling for immediacy', feels crushed by the 'sheer immensity' of the Canadian area, and explains how Greenland has been able to avoid some of the problems of Alaska and Canada. He effectively destroys the 'hell served up for breakfast' image that dominates southern views of the North.

Dyson combines factual information on the problems of oil and gas exploration, the behaviour of sea ice, the *macho* culture in Alaska, and other aspects of the Arctic, with astute observations about the problems there. The book conveys the feel of cold seeping through your clothes, of the sudden, surprising summer warmth, the crowded all-male camps, the strange social relationships in northern communities.

Dyson obviously disliked much of what he saw, but the book is remarkably free of self-righteous moralizing and romanticization. The author struggles to understand what is going on in the Arctic — and why. His travels give him an overview of trends in all three Arctic areas. He concludes: 'Government in the Canadian Arctic is run with heavy-footed Godfather tactics in which Eskimos have asked for nothing but have been continually plied with offers they could not refuse.' The three Arctics, but especially the Canadian one, suffer from both bureaucratic fair play — and bungling.

The Inuit are no longer smiling people, he finds. At Point Hope, a young Inuk refuses him a ride from the airstrip into town, and he lies awake while a teen-age rampage wrecks the community. A Greenlander charges him $25 for a cup of coffee — in his own home. He reports that, in one Arctic settlement, the Inuit refused to take exchange students for a kamotik ride — because they were not being paid.

He accuses Mr Justice Berger of encouraging a 'wait and talk' approach to northern development, rather than a 'plan and do' one. But Dyson never gets to the core of the problems in the Arctic — and in Canada. That part of the country is no longer a place apart — it's peculiarly Canadian. Problems may not be worse there — they may simply be more obvious. And they are rooted in the absence of an understanding of a moral, ethical and spiritual basis for development, social change and cultural contact.

*Jim Lotz, author of 'Northern Realities' (1970), has written three murder mysteries set in the Canadian North.*

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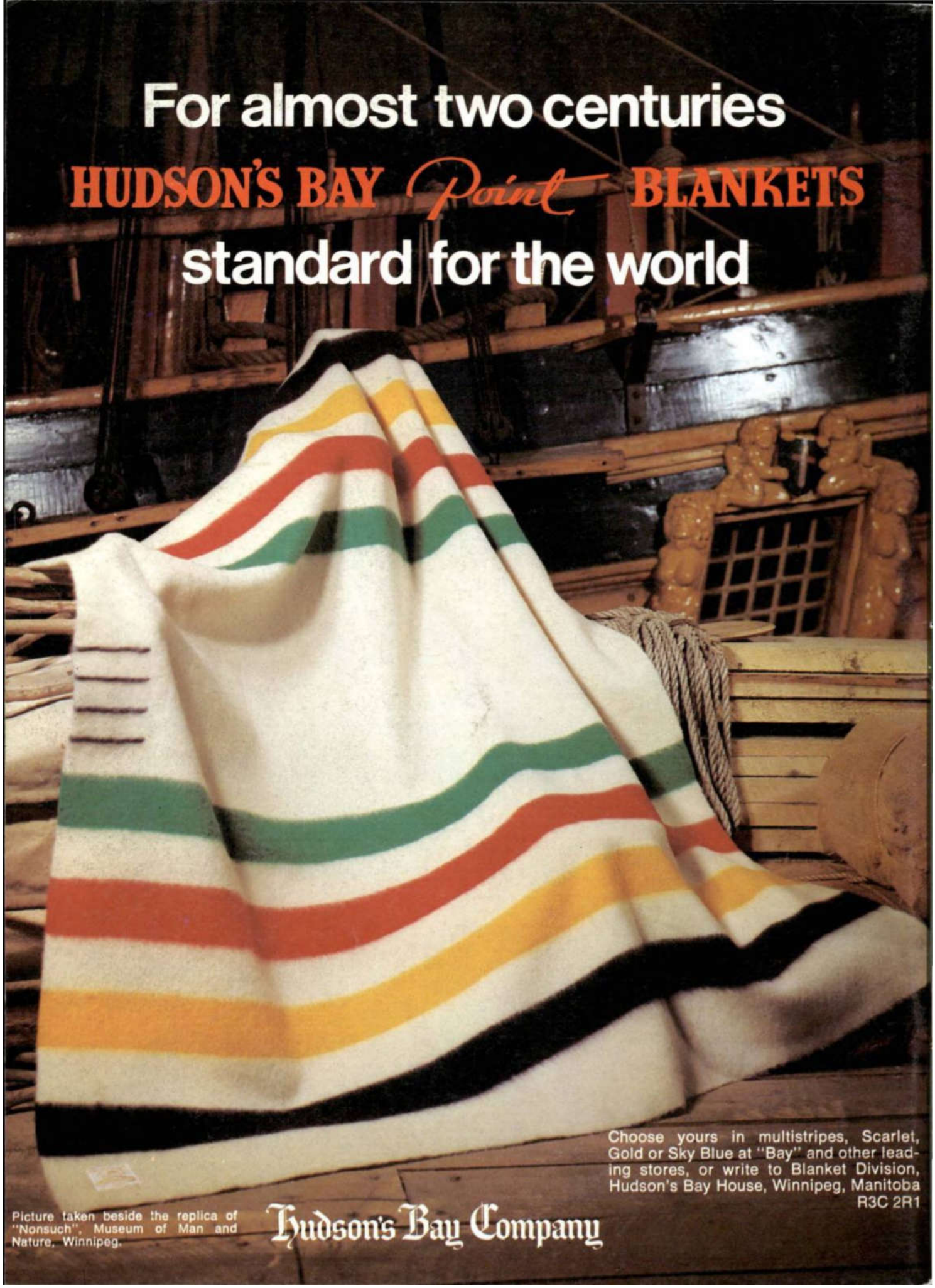
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